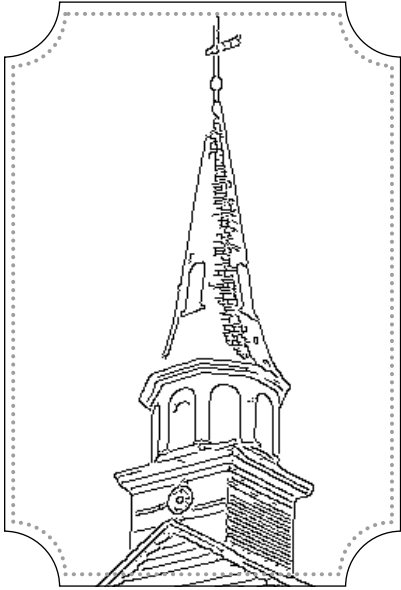




FAITH, FELLOWSHIP & NEWS

HILLSBOROUGH REFORMED CHURCH

AT MILLSTONE

Holiday 2025

The Advent Wreath

By: Nancy Mest

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined ... For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given." -Isaiah 9:2,6

Picture yourself preparing for the visit of a beloved guest in December. Your home is clean, the food is prepared, the beverages are chilling. You turn the lights on to welcome them with joy. During Advent, we prepare our church, like our homes, in joyful anticipation of Jesus's arrival.

The word "Advent" comes from the Latin word meaning "arrival, approach." During the season of Advent, we anticipate the approach and arrival of Jesus Christ in a number of ways. One revered tradition is the Advent Wreath and Candles.

The origin of the modern Advent wreath has been traced back to Johann Hinrich Wichern (1808-1881), a Lutheran pastor in Germany and missionary to the poor. During Advent, children in Wichern's mission school in Hamburg would pester him daily asking if Christmas had yet arrived. To help the children gauge the time left before Christmas (and most probably as an act of self-preservation), he took a large wooden ring from an old cartwheel and decorated it with 24 small red candles and four large white candles. Beginning four weeks before Christmas, one small candle was lit successively every weekday and Saturday during Advent, and a large white candle was lit each Sunday. The custom gained ground among Protestant churches in Germany and evolved into the smaller wreath with four or five candles known today.

The four candles which are lit on the four Sundays of Advent respectively symbolize hope, peace, joy, and love. In many homes and churches, a fifth candle is lit on Christmas Eve or Christmas to represent the birth of Jesus. The Hope candle is also known as the Prophecy candle and represents the expectation of the Messiah's coming and the prophecies foretelling his birth. The Peace candle is also known as the Bethlehem candle and represents the journey to Bethlehem and the faith of Mary and Joseph. The Joy candle is also known as the Shepherd's candle and represents the joy of the shepherds who were the first to hear the good news of Jesus's birth. The Love candle is also known as the Angel's candle and represents the message of "peace on earth, goodwill toward all people" delivered by the angels.

The candles' colors are also steeped in tradition and significance. The hope, peace and love candles are traditionally violet which is the historic liturgical color for three of the four Sundays of Advent. (Note the color of the paraments on the pulpit and the communion table during Advent.) The joy candle is rose which is the liturgical color for the third Sunday of Advent, known as "Gaudete Sunday" (meaning "rejoice ye"). The Christ candle is white and is usually larger than the four Advent candles.

The symbolism of the Advent wreath cannot be understated. As we prepare ourselves, our homes, and our church for the coming of Christ, we add more and more light until the brightest day of all - when Jesus Christ arrives.



In this issue:

- ⇒ The Advent Wreath
- ⇒ All Saints Day
- ⇒ Art Show
- ⇒ Buildings & Grounds
- ⇒ Calendar
- ⇒ Chrismons
- ⇒ Christmas Cookie Recipes
- ⇒ Christmas Missions
- ⇒ Christmas Services
- ⇒ CROP Walk
- ⇒ Focus on Faith—Hope
- ⇒ New Opportunities to Serve
- ⇒ Reflections on the Christmas Pageant
- ⇒ Stephen Leaders

Christmas at Hillsborough Reformed Church- A Season of Worship, Wonder, and Welcome

By: Chrissy Venezia

Christmas at Hillsborough Reformed Church is one of the most joyful and meaningful times of the year. From our beloved children's pageant to three distinct Christmas Eve worship services, there are many opportunities to gather, celebrate, and experience the wonder of Christ's birth. We invite you – family, friends, neighbors, and newcomers – to join!

Children's Christmas Pageant- Sunday, December 21 at 10:00 AM

Our annual Christmas Pageant is a highlight of the season, and this year's presentation promises to be especially delightful. The service will center around the nativity story, led by the children and youth of the church.

Through songs sung by our children, music played by the Children's Chime Choir and Teen/Tween Bell Choir, scripture readings, and charming costumes, the story of Jesus' birth comes to life in a joyful, creative, and heartfelt way.

This service celebrates the beauty of intergenerational worship and the simple, powerful message of Christmas told through the voices of our youngest members.

Christmas Eve Services

On Christmas Eve, we offer three distinct services, each with its own character, style, and worship experience. Whether you are looking for something lively and family-friendly, music-rich and traditional, or peaceful and reflective, there is a place for you at HRC.

4:30 PM – Family Service (New Time!)

Led by Pastor Jeff and his guitar, this service is designed to be meaningful, short, and engaging for young children and people of all ages. It will feature the Christmas story from the gospel of Luke told with interactive motions, sound effects, and beloved Christmas carols lead by acoustic guitar. The service will have a joyful and relaxed spirit and will conclude with the singing of "Jingle Bells" out side the sanctuary—a festive, memory-making moment for children and adults alike.



7:30 PM – Readings & Carols Service (Pre-Service Music Begins at 7:00 PM)

This classic Christmas Eve service weaves together beloved scripture readings and carols, drawing on the talents of our Adult Choir, Bell Choir, and a festive Brass Band.

The experience begins early with beautiful prelude music at 7:00 PM, setting the tone for a rich and inspiring celebration. As the service concludes, the sanctuary is filled with soft candlelight as Christmas is joyfully "rung in."

11:00 PM –Communion Service (Pre-Service Music Begins at 10:40 PM)

The late service offers a peaceful and contemplative Christmas Eve experience. This reflective and meditative worship time includes evocative clarinet music, the celebration of Holy Communion, and the quiet beauty of candle lighting.

Finishing just before midnight, this service gently ushers in Christmas Day with reverence and stillness – a meaningful way to welcome the Christ Child.

You're Invited

Whether you come for the imaginative wonder of the children's pageant or join us on Christmas Eve for one (or more!) of our unique services, we hope you'll experience the warmth, joy, and hope that define Christmas at Hillsborough Reformed Church.



Focus on Faith

Beginning Again in Hope

Pastor Jeff Knol

Every January 1st we celebrate the start of a new calendar year, but did you know that in the life of the Church, our “New Year’s Day” arrives a month early? It’s true. The church calendar year begins with Advent. We don’t drop a ball in Times Square or have a glass of champagne with friends, instead we mark this “new year” by gathering for quiet expectation, candlelight, and an annual reminder of our Christian hope.



Hope is the theme of the first Sunday of Advent, and it’s the first theme we are invited to mull over at the beginning of the holiday season. Before anything else, we gather as people who are called to hope. We look around at a world that can feel dark and heavy, and on that first Sunday of Advent, we light a single candle. That candle reminds us that God sent Jesus, a helpless baby, and yet, the Hope and the Light of the World.

On that Sunday, we remember the promise found in the book of Revelation: the promise of a healed world, with a new Jerusalem, a city glowing with the light of Christ. We remember a city where tears, and pain, and death are no more. We remember the vision of the light of Christ, now shining so brightly that there is no darkness and there is no night. This, my friends, is a great vision to hope for.

Some years, hope comes easily. Other times, hope feels like hard work. Advent reminds us that hope is not something we manufacture on our own. Hope is a gift. It is something God illumines within us. As we read the stories of what God has done in the past, as we listen to the promises God gives for the future, and as we pay attention to the quiet ways God is at work in our hearts right now, hope still rises.

This Advent and Christmas season, I invite you to come, to worship, to listen, to learn, and to lean into God’s gift of hope. Bring whatever you are carrying. Bring your longing and your questions. Bring your desire for something new. And let us begin the church year together, trusting that God will meet us, and rekindle our hope, once again.

Christmas Stockings Mission

By: Jerrie Hoover

Our Missions and Benevolences Committee is again requesting Christmas donations for three Somerset County Organizations. These include: SHIP (serving the homeless, near homeless and working poor), Visions and Pathways (temporary home for displaced teenagers) and Learning Gate Daycare Center.

Learning Gate expressed a need for gloves for children through age 5. There will be a mitten tree in the church where donated mittens can be hung.

The stocking tree in the church vestibule holds stockings containing a list of suggested gift items for each organization. Please take one or as many as you wish and return them with your donated gifts on or before our Christmas service on December 14. Please mark the organization for which the stocking is intended on the stocking. The stockings will be delivered to the agencies the following day.

Thank you for your continued support of this Christmas mission.

Opportunity to Serve—New Teams Being Created

The current Outreach & Evangelism Team is being split into two NEW teams. This is an excellent opportunity to get involved as each new team begins its work in 2026.

The new Outreach & Communications Team will focus on marketing our established ministries and will function as our marketing and communications hub. Its work will include publicizing existing ministries; managing the church’s website, Facebook page, and similar platforms; and producing advertising materials. To get involved, contact Sam Benson (samuelkben234@gmail.com).

The new Evangelism & New Ministries Team will focus on launching new ministries to reach new people in new ways. Its work will include studying, proposing, and helping to launch new ministry efforts; serving as an incubation for fresh ways to share Christ’s love with those outside typical church circles; and empowering members to share their faith with others and to participate in new ministries. To get involved, contact Pastor Jeff Knol.

Favorite Christmas Cookies from your Newsletter Team



Thumbprint Cookies

3 1/2 - 4 dozen

From: Nancy Mest

1 C. (2 sticks) butter, softened
1 C. sugar
1 egg
1 t. vanilla
3 C. flour
Jams/jellies

Cream butter and sugar. Add egg and vanilla, mix well, scrape bowl. Add flour.

Roll into 1" balls, place on ungreased cookie sheet, make indentation in center of each dough ball. Put approx. 1/2 t. jam or jelly in each indentation.

Bake at 350° for 8 - 10 minutes or until lightly browned.

Pecan Delights

From: Jayne Parks

1 C. butter or margarine
1/2 C. sugar
2 C. flour
1 1/2 - 2 C. pecans or walnuts
1 t. vanilla
3 t. water

Cream butter, add other ingredients - mix by hand.

Shape like dates and arrange on greased cookie sheet. Bake 35 minutes in 300°. Sprinkle or roll in powdered sugar.

No-Bake Chocolate Cookies

3-4 dozen

From: Jerrie Hoover

2 C. Sugar	3 C. Oatmeal
1/3 C. Cocoa	1 C. Coconut
1/2 C. Butter	1/2 C. Chopped nuts
1/2 C. Milk	1 t. Vanilla

Mix sugar, cocoa, butter and milk in saucepan and boil for 3 minutes. Remove from heat; add vanilla. Mix oatmeal, coconut, and nuts; pour milk mixture over dry ingredients and mix thoroughly. Drop from teaspoon onto waxed paper. Work quickly before it cools and hardens.

Toasted Walnut Slices

From: Emily Russoniello

Preheat oven to 350.

1/4 lb. butter
1 cup sugar
3 eggs
3 cups flour
1/4 tsp salt
3 tsp. baking powder
1 tsp vanilla
1 cup chopped walnuts

Cream butter, gradually add sugar; beat until light. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each egg. Add sifted dry ingredients. Stir in vanilla and chopped nuts.

Turn dough out on lightly floured board. Divide into 3 parts and shape each part into a loaf. Place on greased baking sheet.

Bake 20-25 minutes until golden brown. Remove to racks to cool. Cut loaves into 1" thick slices. Place cut side up on baking sheet. Return to oven until lightly toasted. Turn, and toast other side.

Reflections on the Christmas Pageant

By: Emily Russoniello

Every year the Sunday School teachers would assign the parts for the Christmas pageant, and every year, I was not Mary.

In retrospect, it was nothing personal. I was heavily involved in the junior choir, and those of us who weren't afraid to sing out were always angels, or possibly shepherds. We weren't the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, but what we lacked in vocal technique we made up for in volume. Mary wasn't much of a singing role. Her basic responsibility was to sit quietly next to Joseph and try not to drop Cabbage Patch Jesus into the manger.

But that didn't matter, because Mary was The Star, and my parents had taken me to see "Annie" in NY. I had DREAMS! The Sunday School Christmas pageant was my sole opportunity to pad my resume and jumpstart my acting career. Broadway, here I come!

I think you can guess how that turned out.

It wasn't only that it was the lead female role. Mary was serene, pretty, overflowing with faith and trust in God, and got to wear sky-blue robes, my favorite color. On the other hand, I was awkward, painfully shy, and insecure. If I played Mary, I thought, some of that goodness would rub off on ME and people would see me that way through osmosis.

That didn't turn out, either, but I managed to soldier on.

Years later, I've grown up and have children, and just like that, the Christmas pageant steamrolls its way back into my life. But it's not about Mary anymore. It's mostly about cows.

Over the years my kids have been shepherds, kings, angels, wise men...but somehow, for a string of years, I was up until the wee hours the night before the pageant making cow costumes. Just me, and my hot glue gun, and some clothes from WalMart and a few sheets of black felt.

A more logical person might carefully fold up the cow costume after the pageant and put it in a safe spot, to be called into service the next year and save me from another all-nighter.

If you haven't figured it out by now, I am not that person.

The next morning, FAR too early for the cow-builders of the world, we bundle everyone into the car and descend into the joyful chaos of the church basement, where it's a riot of burlap and sashes and farm animals and halos and prop frankincense and hay and laughter. Finally, the adults manage to get the kids up the stairs and the parents slide into the pews.

I fight to keep my eyes open, deeply regretting leaving the cow construction until the very last minute, and at the end of the prayer of confession I use the silent prayer time to ask God to PLEASE prevent my children from spilling all our family secrets to the entire congregation in the middle of the Christmas pageant.

You all know how it goes. It's charming, and the imperfections somehow make it even more perfect. The angels bought glad tidings of great joy.

I was never Mary, but it was ok.



Kit, Andrew and Dari Russoniello rocking their pageant costumes

All Saints Day

By: Pastor Jeff Knol

A few weeks ago, on All Saints Sunday and during our communion liturgy, many worshippers were able to come forward to light candles. They did so in remembrance of our loved ones who have passed into God's eternal care. During that sacramental moment, we used candles as a visible sign of our faith in the "Communion of the Saints," and a reminder that in Christ, death cannot sever the bonds of God's love for us. Those candles shared their light, reminding us of all God's Saints, who are standing before God's heavenly throne, shining in glory, held in God's love and care.



As Reformed Christians, we come from a tradition that, during the time of the Reformation, sometimes intentionally stripped worship of many tangible expressions of devotion, including candles. The Reformers believed that things like statues, icons, paintings, stained glass, and candles had eclipsed the importance of the word of God, both written and proclaimed. They wanted Christians to focus on God's word, read in the Bible, or heard in the sermon, so they cleared our sanctuaries of what they saw as distractions. Candles, stained glass, paintings, and icons were discarded and, in some cases, even destroyed!

Over the past five centuries, Reformed folks like us have come to understand that while symbols can sometimes mislead or distract, they can also be aids to help express and deepen our faith. God created us with bodies as well as minds and hearts. We encounter and learn about God not only through reading and hearing, but also through our senses of touch, sight, taste and even smell! Think of the smooth feeling of a glass candle holder and the warmth of a small flame cradled in the palm of your hand. Think of the flickering glow of dozens of candles, shining through colored glass. Think of the gentle curl of smoke rising up toward the sanctuary ceiling. Think of the smell of wax and smoke. Better than thinking of it, go light a candle right now and drink it in through all your senses! God can use these tangible elements to touch our souls in ways that words sometimes struggle to accomplish.

To light a candle is one way to make a prayer, or a doctrine, visible. It is a small act of faith that can say, "My loved-one, their light is not gone. It shines together with the resurrected light of Christ." The candles together are a sign of "the Communion of Saints," a doctrine which reminds us that we remain joined to those who have gone before us. We are joined to them not by memory alone, but by the life of the Risen Christ who holds all of his people in his victorious love.

The reading and preaching of Scripture will always remain central in our expressions of devotion; they are the foundation of our faith and tradition. But tangible expressions like candle lighting can help us embody and experience the truths scripture proclaims. Whether you were there to light a candle, or were joined with us from far away in prayer, I hope this practice can be a reminder to you: our loved ones live in God's keeping, and we remain bound together by God's love, it is like a light that will never be extinguished.

Chrismons

When people are asked to describe a favorite Christmas tradition, one of the top answers is always decorating the Christmas tree. Whether it's white lights or colored, blinking or not, tinsel or garland or none, each home has its own special way of trimming the tree.

This also goes for our church family. A favorite event in our church lives for many families and members is the evening we meet in the Sanctuary to decorate the Christmas tree with our Chrismons. Entering the sanctuary with filled stockings for our Christmas missions and mittens for Learning Gate, we see the bare pine tree on the chancel just begging to be trimmed. We sing beloved Christmas carols and hear a story or message about the season.

Then the tree trimming begins. The children are first with their photo ornaments, each scrambling over the other to put their ornament in a prime spot. Next come the Chrismons, each unique, each lovingly hand-made by a member of our congregation. The white, silver and gold ornaments each represent a symbol of Christ - for example, the Anchor Cross represents the Cross of Hope, the Chi (X) represents the first letter of Christ in Greek, the Alpha and Omega (AQ) represent the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, a symbol of divinity, and the Crown represents Christ's kingship.

When all of the Chrismons are up, the lights dim and the tree is lit. It is a thing of beauty.

All of that decorating can work up a need for treats and that is how we end this event - with Christmas cookies and fellowship.

This year's Chrismons service is on Sunday, December 14 at 6 pm. It is an event that shouldn't be missed!



Buildings and Grounds Update Blue Jeans, Stoves and a Scatter Garden

By: Mike Williams

The Buildings and Grounds Committee has been busy.

Blue Jeans Sunday was held November 9th after worship. We had a great turnout and thanks to all who helped clean up the Church grounds.

The 1950s vintage stove in Memorial Hall has served our Church Family well but the time has come to replace it. Members who have been with our Church the longest recall the wonderful fellowship working together to prepare meals in the kitchen. We hope to continue that tradition with a new stove. A committee of members interested in this project came up with a plan to install a new stove that will meet the needs of the congregation for many years to come. The new stove will be comparable in capabilities to the old stove but with modern features. A new hood and exhaust system with automatic on/off will replace the old hood with manual cable-operated vents. The total cost for the stove, hood, and installation is expected to be about \$18,000. A generous donor has offered to cover the cost of the stove, and the Art Show raised nearly \$1,000 for the stove project. We will be relying on the support of the congregation to raise the remainder of the funds needed (about \$9,000). Watch for more information on how you can help in the coming months.

A Scatter Garden is planned for the graveyard where the old dogwood stood. A Scatter Garden is a place where ashes can be placed and loved ones can come to remember the departed. The design by Lisa Adamson shows three natural-stone patios in the shape of interlocking rings representing Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Three Orton Dogwoods will surround the patios. The project will be funded by an anonymous donor, and the stones will be installed in January with the plantings to follow in the Spring. This will also give us a place where the Easter sunrise service can be held.

New Stephen Leaders Commissioned

Having completed a rigorous training program, Reverend Jeff Knol and Connie Ducaine were commissioned as our newest Stephen Ministry Leaders. Pictured: 4 Current Stephen Leaders— Connie Ducaine, Jill Panico, Jean Thomas and Reverend Jeff Knol.



Holiday Calendar

DATE	EVENT
Sun. Nov. 30	First Sunday of Advent – Lighting the Candle of Hope 8:15 and 10:00 am services
Sun. Dec. 7	Second Sunday of Advent – Lighting the Candle of Peace No Early (8:15) Service Annual Congregational Meeting following 10:00 am service
Thu. Dec. 11	SHIP Lunch
Sun. Dec. 14	Third Sunday of Advent – Lighting the Candle of Joy 8:15 and 10:00 am services Christmas Stockings due back to church Chrismons, Carols and Cookies – 6:00 pm
Sun. Dec. 21	Fourth Sunday of Advent – Lighting the Candle of Love No Early (8:15) service Children's Christmas Pageant during 10:00 service
Wed. Dec. 24	Christmas Eve Services: 4:30 pm – Family Service 7:30 pm – Readings and Carols (pre service music starts at 7:00 pm) 11:00 pm – Communion Service (pre service music starts at 10:40 pm)
Sun. Dec. 28	No Early (8:15 am) Service, Healing Service during 10:00 am service
Sun. Jan. 4	No Early (8:15 am) Service, Communion during 10:00 am service
Thu. Jan. 8	SHIP Lunch
Sun. Jan 11	8:15 and 10:00 am services Installation of New Consistory Members during 10:00 am service
Recurring Events: Mondays 9:30 am – Unfinished Projects Group – Memorial Hall Wednesdays 7:00 am – Prayer Group – Pastor's Study Wednesdays 7:00 pm – Bible Study – Memorial Hall	

HRC Hosts Sixth Annual Art Show—"Finding Joy"

B: Mike Williams

Memorial Hall was once again turned into an Art Gallery for two days in November. This was the sixth annual Art Show hosted by our Church. The first show in 2017 celebrated our 250th anniversary and featured works by Biff Hiens and Janet Singley in a show titled "Impressions of the Millstone Valley". Each year since then, the show has had a different theme, "Artists of the Millstone Valley", "Beauty all Around Us", "Healing Art" and last year "Inspiration". This year, we celebrated the Joy artists find in creating Art and sharing it with others. The title of the show was "Finding Joy". It was a special event for the community with more than 160 visitors, and the show raised \$963 which will go toward replacing the stove in Memorial Hall.



Pastor Jeff being interviewed at the Art Show.

The Hillsborough Reformed Church
at Millstone

ART SHOW
and Sale
2025



CROP Walk 2025

By: Pam Williams

This year the CROP Hunger Walk took place in Colonial Park. Three churches participated with a total of 35 people walking both in person and virtually. So far, the walk has raised a total of \$10,999, of which \$1,375 will go to the Foodbank of Somerset County and \$1,375 to SHIP. HRC once again led the way with 17 walkers raising \$8,409 of the total. Thank you for your amazing support!

Newsletter Team:

Dave Mest (david.mest@shu.edu)
Jerrie Hoover (hooverjerrie@gmail.com)
Eric Kraehenbuehl (cirekaye15@hotmail.com)
Nancy Mest (nansox@aol.com)
Margo Myer (mrgmyr@comcast.net)
Jayne Parks (JL09154@gmail.com)
Emily Russoniello (ekprussoniello@gmail.com)
Chrissy Venezia (chrissyprissy99@aol.com)
(Your Name Here—Join the team!)

