THE ANCHOR

A Publication of The House of Hope Presbyterian Church



Issue No. 349

December 2026

HOUSE OF HOPE

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Anchor Magazine Staff

Christopher Freeze: Director of Development
Johan C. Wyckoff: Communications and Events Coordinator

Special thanks to Ivan Agbonlahor, Madeline Cieslak, Matthew Culloton, David Goudzwaard-Vaught, Pat Freeburg, April Greibrok, Jimmy Hoke, Scott Jones, Elsa Kendig, Timothy Short, and Jeffrey Van, and you for reading.

About the Cover

Long-retired Christmas Bulletin Illustration

If you visit the Kirby Lounge, look for the stacks of boxes along the east wall, each labeled with a range of years. Inside are dozens of handsome, buckram-bound volumes-that hold House of Hope's service bulletins dating back to the early 1900s. Like the bulletins we use today, they record when each service took place, who preached, what the sermon was titled, and what music was performed. The community announcements offer a glimpse of life at House of Hope and in the lives of its members.



The illustration on our cover first appeared on House of Hope's Christmas Sunday service bulletins in 1935. It was the first full-color image to appear in any House of Hope bulletin. We searched the bulletins and the church archives, which are managed by the Ramsey County Historical Society, for clues about who created the illustration and how it was commissioned. Both questions remain unanswered. The illustration continued to appear in every Christmas Sunday service bulletin through 1959.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A Note from Scott. 3
In The House. 4
The Sounds of Christmas 6
The Tableaux Service 8
Christmas Eve World Premiere 10
Hope Arts Center 12
Children, Youth, & Family Ministry 16
Faces of HOH 18
A History of Hope. 22

Staff Corner: Ivan Agbonlahor



Tell us about yourself and what brought you to House of Hope.

I am originally from Nigeria, husband to my beautiful, blessed wife, dad to my amazingly blessed kids, and I am excited to be part of the House of Hope community. What attracted me to HOH was the opportunity to become part of a welcoming community with a strong sense of purpose, service, and connection.

What do you do at House of Hope, and what do you enjoy most?

I am the Director of Facilities here at HOH. In my role here, I enjoy working with people, building relationships, and being part of a team working toward a common goal.

What might people be surprised—or delighted—to learn about you?

I really enjoy cooking, eating various kinds of food from every part of the world, which helps me connect with various cultures and people. And lastly, I am a huge sports fan, especially for all teams Minnesota, and Arsenal FC, a soccer team in the English Premier League.

Holy Darkness
Advent 2026

November 29
Spirit Moving in the Dark
Genesis 1:1-5

Our Advent reflections begin at the beginning. At the creation of the world, the Spirit of God moves over the waters and brings order and fullness to the formless void. From the dark depths creation is born.

December 6
Wrestling at Night
Genesis 32:24-30

As Jacob wrestled in night, we also wrestle with the depths of ourselves, our own shadow sides. Life includes periods of struggle, purgation, and suffering. But our tradition teaches that we can find God even here, in the dark night of the soul.

December 13
Call in the Dark
1 Samuel 3:1-9

Barbara Brown Taylor writes about a lunar spirituality which recognizes that what we call the dark emotions are "conduits of pure energy that want something from us: to wake us up, to tell us something we need to know, to break the ice around our hearts, to move us to act." How is God speaking to you in the darkness?

December 20
God Dwells in Darkness
1 Kings 8:1-13

At the dedication of the Temple, King Solomon proclaimed that God dwells in thick darkness. As we approach the longest night of the year, we are reminded that divine darkness is, in our biblical and spiritual tradition, the source of mystery, awe, wonder, possibility, creativity, nourishment, and holiness.

December 24
By Night
Luke 2:1-20

At night, under difficult and troubled circumstances, the Christ was born. And so, by night, the Christ is born anew in us this year.

A Note from Scott

One of my former congregants in Oklahoma City often shared about how much she enjoyed all of the "light Sundays"—Epiphany and Transfiguration especially.

Our tradition is rich with metaphors of light, connecting us to spirituality, insight, and the divine. I think of the line from the hymn "Immortal, Invisible" in which we sing "in light inaccessible, hid from our eyes." The idea is that God resides in light so bright that it is blinding.

Often at Advent and Christmas, worship and spirituality focus on finding light in the darkness, especially with these weeks being the darkest of the year.

However, this year I want our worship to focus on the darkness itself.

A light-supremacy exists in our worship language that is ethically problematic. Our contemporary anti-racist awareness should caution this light-supremacy.

Focusing exclusively on the light also misses the rich tradition of Holy Darkness.

When King Solomon finished dedicating the temple in Jerusalem, the presence of God descends upon the building as a thick cloud and Solomon proclaims, "God dwells in darkness."

Consider how often sanctuaries and other sacred spaces are dark. Enter our sanctuary sometime other than a worship service, when all the artificial lights are off and the stained glass windows are filtering and altering the sunlight, and you'll experience a sense of mystery and awe.

The theme of Holy Darkness enriches the Christian tradition. For example, the Greek theologian Pseudo-Dionysius described God as "luminous darkness," and talked of the depths of God that exceed our finite human abilities to understand.

The medieval mystic Meister Eckhart described God as the grunt, the ground, the dark soil in which we are planted. The grunt is

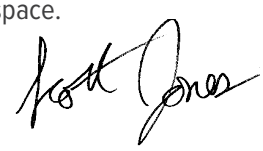


"pure possibility," and Eckhart teaches us to "go into your own ground and there act, and the works that you do there will be living."

The 20th century Russian theologian Sergius Bulgakov wrote, "The roots of a person's being are submerged in the bottomless ocean of divine life and get their nourishment from this life." The depths of the ocean are a dark place.

In the 21st century, feminist theologian Catherine Keller has encouraged us to embrace "the depths of life, in which are mingled the depths of divinity itself," so that we might "participate in an open-ended creativity."

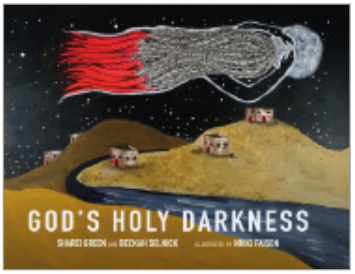
Maybe the greatest Christian writing about Holy Darkness was *Dark Night of the Soul* by the sixteenth century Spaniard San Juan de la Cruz, known in English as St. John of the Cross. The dark night is a spiritual experience wherein the soul is stripped of its desires and affections in a period of quietness. Which is precisely the moment when God is most present with us. Emptying ourselves of what normally captures our attention gives God a chance to fill that space.



Winter Worship Theme:
Holy Darkness

Divine darkness is, in our biblical and spiritual tradition, the source of mystery, awe, wonder, possibility, creativity, nourishment, and holiness.

This Advent, during the darkest weeks of the year, we will explore these themes in our worship together.



Available in the Children's Library!

Events at-a-Glance

December 2026

Choir School Holiday Plant & Wreath Sale Pick Up—Dec. 2

Monroe Crossing, A Bluegrass Christmas—Dec. 5

Great Advent Bake-Off—Dec. 6

Advent 2—Dec. 6

Sponsor-A-Family Gift Deadline—Dec. 6

Tweens Night—Dec. 11

Sponsor-A-Family Youth Pick Up—Dec. 12

Choir School Concert—Dec. 13

Youth White Elephant Christmas Party—Dec. 13

Advent 3—Dec. 13

Carols and Christmas Cheer Party—Dec. 16

Tableaux Service—Dec. 19

Advent 4—Dec. 20

Carol Sing-Along—Dec. 20

Christmas Eve Candlelight Services—Dec. 24

Holiday Carillon Recital—Dec. 25

First Sunday of Christmas—Dec. 27

Carols for Handbells and Harp—Jan. 3

Monroe Crossing: *A Bluegrass Christmas*

Saturday, December 5, 7 p.m., Sanctuary

Monroe Crossing has been entertaining audiences for over 25 years, performing over 2,600 shows. Whether appearing in an intimate room, community theater, major venue or outdoor festival, Monroe Crossing always presents a highly entertaining show making them favorites among bluegrass connoisseurs and non-bluegrass audiences alike! Join us for a special Bluegrass Christmas concert, hosted by Hope Arts Center and House of Hope Presbyterian Church, for your favorite Christmas songs performed "bluegrass style"! Visit hohchurch.org/tickets for more information.



Great Advent Bake-Off

Sunday, December 6, 11:15 a.m., Great Hall

Calling all bakers, of all ages: The third annual Great Advent Cookie Bake-Off is coming up on December 6, after worship. Do you think you have the confectionary skills to win a coveted grand prize? If so, the sign-up is officially open:

bit.ly/AdventCookieBakeOff

We hope many of you will compete this year and the rest will come eat and vote for a winner. Questions: email Jimmy (JimmyH@hohchurch.org) or Elsa (ElsaK@hohchurch.org).



Carols and Christmas Cheer

Open-House Party
Wednesday, December 16, 5–7 p.m., Assembly Room

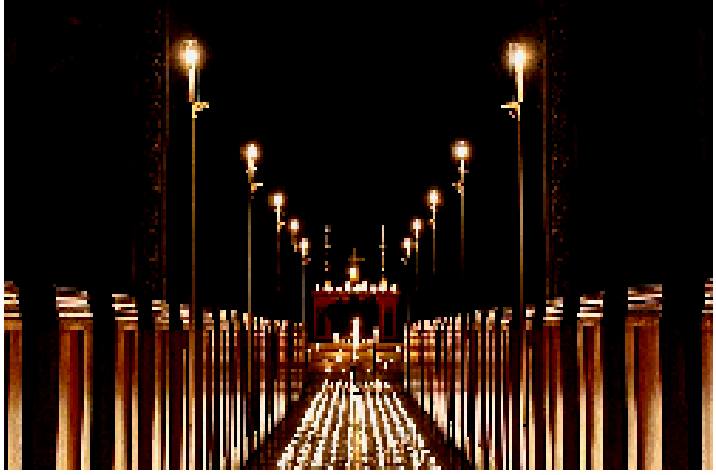
Join us for House of Hope's annual holiday open house! Catch up with friends, meet a neighbor, and enjoy festive food and drinks for all ages. Kids can take part in holiday activities and visit with Santa Claus. Then lend your voice to a Christmas carol sing-along led by Aaron David Miller.



Christmas Eve Services

Thursday, December 24, 5 and 7:30 p.m.

Christmas Eve Services will take place in the Sanctuary during Christmas Eve with sweeping performances from the Motet Choir. Please join in worship with candles and fellowship.



Tableaux Service

Saturday, December 19, 5 p.m., Sanctuary

Experience the Christmas story through scripture, music, and living pictures at House of Hope's Tableaux service. From Gabriel's announcement to Mary to the shepherds and wise men, familiar scenes come to life as members of the congregation portray the people of the Nativity. Join us to celebrate Christ's birth together. See pages 7–8 for more information.



Holiday Carillon Recital

Friday, December 25, 3 p.m.



Step outside and listen as House of Hope carillonneur Timothy Short celebrates the birth of Christ with a festive program of familiar carols and other holiday repertoire, sacred and secular. Music from *A Charlie Brown Christmas* will make an appearance, and the recital ends with "We wish You a Merry Christmas" sounding out from the tower across the neighborhood!

Sponsor-A-Family

Through Sunday December 6, Assembly Room

The House of Hope community reminds us what the Christmas season is about: sharing with those most in need. This year we're planning to spread Christmas joy by providing gifts for 60 families in partnership with the YWCA, Neighborhood House, Community of Peace School, and the Wilder Foundation.

Donations are welcome to provide a grocery gift card for each family. Mail or drop off donations in the church office with the memo: Sponsor a Family.

Please drop off gifts in the Assembly Room by Sunday, December 6.

Carols for Handbells and Harp

Sunday, January 3, 2027, 9:45 a.m., Sanctuary

On the final Sunday of the Christmas season, the Bells of Hope will bring the sounds of handbells, harp, and voice together in worship. Harpist Rachel Brandwein and soprano Jessica Bandelin will join the ringers for a special musical celebration of Christmastide.



Anthems

December 6
Climb to the Top of the Highest Mountain: Jennings
Keep Your Lamps: Thomas

December 13
O Thou The Central Orb: Wood
They That Wait Upon the Lord: Near

December 19
Traditional Tableaux Service with Carols and Anthems

December 20
And the Glory of the Lord: Handel
Before the Marvel of This Night: Schalk

December 24
Journey to Christmas: Van

The Sounds of Christmas

Dr. Aaron David Miller reflects on Music for Advent and Christmastide

Advent is a particularly fascinating season in the church's musical tradition. Some of the most ancient melodies and texts of the church were written specifically for this season. Hymns such as "Savior of the Nations Come" and "Creator of the Stars of Night" are so ancient that their exact origins are difficult to pinpoint. The music of Advent beautifully evokes the contrasts between light and darkness, waiting and fulfillment, and hope emerging in times of hopelessness.

One of the most well-known Advent hymns "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," is based on an ancient chant melody in a minor mode. The "O Antiphones" text, on which the hymn is based, dates back to 6th-century Italy. based, dates back to 6th-century Italy. The text invites God's presence into a world filled with darkness and difficulty. It is one of the oldest religious texts still sung today.

Each verse invites Christ to us using a different scriptural bidding, such as *O Emmanuel, O Wisdom, O Desire of Nations, O Key of David,* and *Root of Jesse*. Together, these verses cumulatively reflect the many ways Christ is present in our lives. As we transition into the Christmas season, the music changes from dark, modal tonalities to clear, bright keys that celebrate the birth of Christ. It is also a time of year where we sing carols originating from cultures around the world.

For example, French carols like "Angels We Have Heard on High" and "O Holy Night," the Polish lullaby "Infant Holy, Infant Lowly," and African-American spirituals like "Go, Tell It on the Mountain" all celebrate Christmas through a beautiful variety of musical styles and languages. One hymn with a particularly rich history is "Twas in the Moon of Wintertime." While the tune is originally French-Canadian from the mid-17th century, the text is a retelling of the Christmas story through the poetry of the native Huron people living in the Great Lakes region of Canada.

Choir School

December 6 (10 a.m. Service Music)
St Cecilia and St Nicholas Choirs
Climb to the Top of the Highest Mountain
Alleluia Choir

December 13 (11:15 a.m. Choir School Concert)
St Cecilia and St Nicholas Choirs

The Choir School will sing the Advent Choral Antiphon at the start of the service on every Sunday in Advent

An Advent Tradition

Jessica Bandelin, Choir School Director

Every House of Hope Chorister knows these words:

From Heaven above, to Earth,
He comes!
Alleluia, Alleluia!
To bear good news
to everyone!
Alleluia, Alleluia!

Starting in early November, the Choir School starts practicing the Advent Choral Antiphon. Each Sunday in Advent a group of choristers makes the trek to the Minstrels' Gallery, high above the West Transept to sing out and ring the bells.

So many thoughts race through their heads:

"We get to be in this special space?"

"Can they really hear us from way up here"

"There's a trapdoor?"

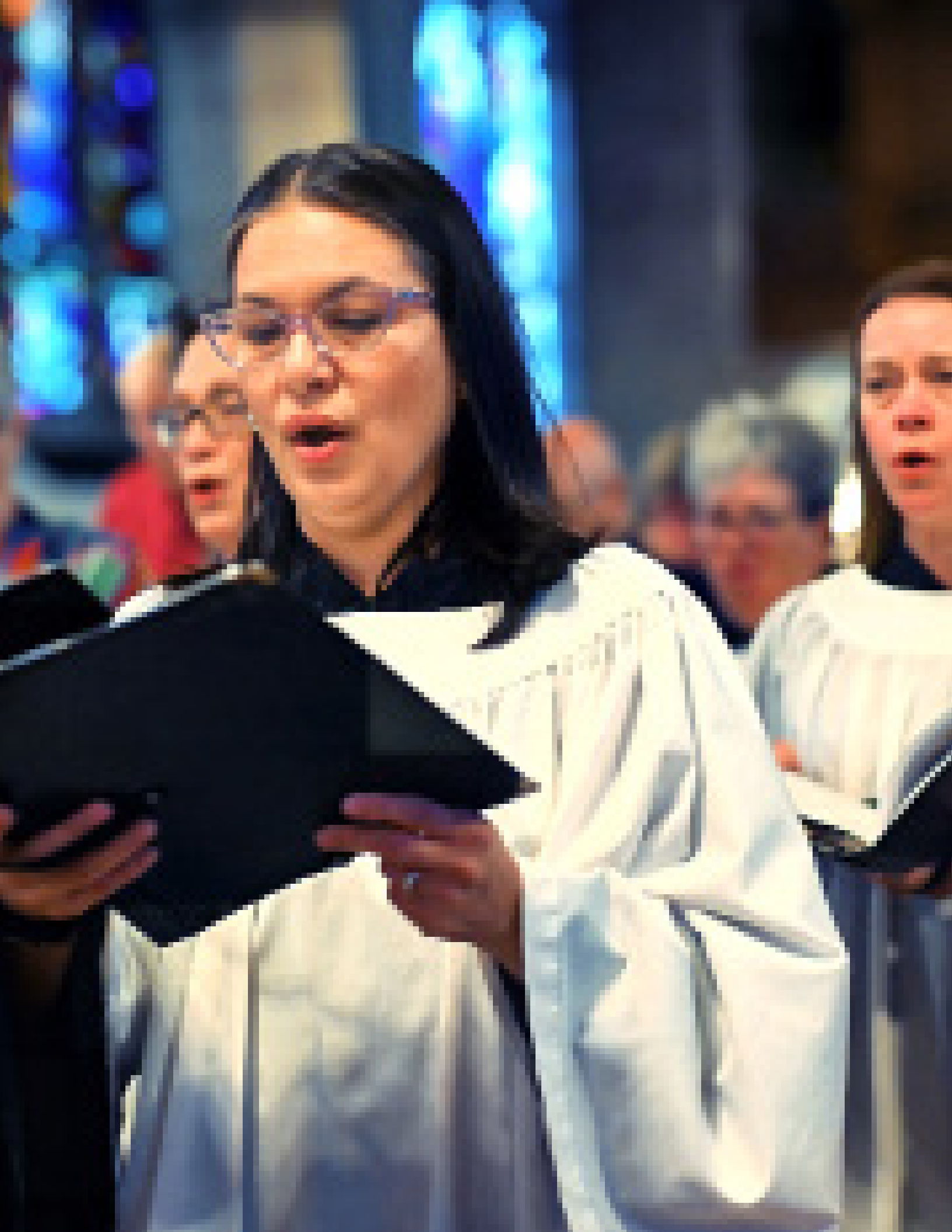
"Will we all fit?"

"Should we be worried about falling?"

In my time as a chorister, and later director, I have heard the same questions, excitement, and anxieties over and over, but we always let the children know that the congregation can hear them perfectly, they are absolutely safe, and please be cool about the trapdoor and do your best not to catch anyone's toes!

We have had the joy of welcoming Choir School alumni to join us over the years. Each time, the former choristers share how much they enjoyed singing and ringing as they took part in this beautiful Advent tradition here at House of Hope.





The Origins of the Tableaux

Dr. Aaron David Miller

One of the much-loved Christmas traditions at House of Hope is the presentation of the Tableaux Service. This unique service has been presented at House of Hope for over 100 years and draws visitors from throughout the Twin Cities. The Tableaux Service was created by two remarkable House of Hope members whose efforts are still remembered decades after their service.

In 1900, House of Hope member Grace Whitridge established the Theater Department at Macalester College. In the years that followed, Whitridge became locally renowned for her mastery of a unique theatrical art form: tableaux productions. Young actors would freeze in meticulously posed, silent scenes to visually depict a narrative while a storyteller provided an accompanying narration. Whitridge would transform literary works into visual productions. Under her leadership, iconic stories like Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* were retold in elaborate Tableaux productions attracting audiences to the Macalester College campus.

During this same era, Whitridge was leading youth theatrical productions at House of Hope. The productions were simple retellings of biblical stories like Daniel and the Lions and the story of the Prodigal Son. These productions were not tableaux in nature, but fairly basic theatrical opportunities for young people at HOH to experience stories of faith.

These two theatrical endeavors would eventually be combined by Grace Whitridge. The very first Tableaux service was held on Christmas Day morning in 1919. However, it was not originally called a "Tableaux Service." It was introduced to the congregation as "The Church School Christmas Service." Rather than taking place in the sanctuary, these first productions were held in the Assembly Room.



"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace"

"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God."



Very little documentation survives from the first few years aside from brief bulletin announcements and publicity descriptions. However, it is clear from descriptions that this was the birth of the Tableaux Service as we know it today. A central narrator would read the Christmas story as young actors presented static, frozen visual scenes (tableaux) to illustrate the scripture. Initially, the congregation sang carols that aligned as the story unfolded.

These first productions became so successful that in 1922, the Session voted to move this new service into the main sanctuary. At this point it began to be referred to as the "Tableaux Service." Additional Christmas carols and choir pieces were added to further flesh out the presentation. To keep the Tableaux Service more like a worship experience and less like a theatrical production, the congregation was encouraged to sing the "Gloria Patri" and various "Amens" which were familiar elements of the Sunday morning service at the time.

In 1944, a new chapter began under the leadership of Margaret Day, who led the Tableaux Service for an astonishing 55 years. Margaret Day's connection to the Tableaux Service ran deep: she was a former Macalester College student of the founder, Grace Whitridge, an active House of Hope member, and was hired directly onto the Macalester faculty upon her graduation. Under her long leadership, the service underwent a series of transformations that shaped the service into what we experience today.

Additional tableaux scenes were added and the role of music was again updated. Congregational singing was entirely phased out, and the choir took on a more prominent role in driving the service. Choral works such as Handel's Hallelujah Chorus and O Holy Night were added as they became increasingly familiar in popular media like film and TV. Also, choral works by composers such as Mozart, Palestrina, and Schubert were frequently substituted into the service. At some point during the 1950s, string players were added to the performance, expanding the musical texture beyond the traditional choir and organ.

A surviving 1967 Tableaux script reveals a structure that almost perfectly matches today's Tableaux Service.

The Tableaux service has become a much-loved Christmas experience for both HOH members and visitors alike. Multiple generations of family members have participated in the service as various roles are passed from one generation to the next. What began as a modest Sunday school pageant in the Assembly Room has evolved into a remarkable community event celebrating Christmas through art and music.

The Tableaux Service will take place at 5 p.m. on Saturday, December 19.

The Journey to Christmas

Jeffrey Van and Matt Culotton on the Christmas Eve World Premiere

On Christmas Eve, House of Hope's choir, orchestra, and soloists will present the world premiere of Jeffrey Van's cantata, *The Journey to Christmas.* For Jeffrey, it will be a chance to hear a new work come to life in his own church, performed by musicians he knows, with his daughter Rebecca among the singers.



A work shaped by House of Hope

Jeffrey joined House of Hope about a decade ago, drawn by the music and worship. His relationship with choir director Matthewhew Culloton reaches back even further, to the late 1990s. As the cantata developed, that friendship and other connections within the congregation helped shape the music.

The first nudge toward a Christmas cantata came from another longtime musician friend, who kept urging Jeffrey to write one. He had composed many Christmas anthems, but a cantata was something he had never planned. Something like an extended anthem, a cantata brings together several sections for choir and soloists, with instrumental accompaniment. His friend's persistence persuaded him to begin looking for texts, starting with Christina Rossetti, whose poetry he had set before.

> *I see the hills, I see the valley,*
> *I see the host upon the wing.*
>
> *I see angels on clouds,*
> *Coming with speech and friendship to us,*
> *To tell us that Christ is born,*
> *The King of Kings of the land of salvation.*
>
> *Carmina Gadelica* (1900)

Another friendship begun at one of House of Hope's outdoor summer services led him to a second source. A fellow congregant introduced Jeffrey to Carmina Gadelica, a collection of Gaelic prayers and incantations preserved from oral tradition, whose first two volumes appeared in 1900. Its Christmas texts offered another voice to place alongside Rossetti's poems, helping him assemble the narrative.

Rebecca also helped him through a difficult part of the writing. Jeffrey had struggled to find an approach to the baritone solo ("I See The Hills"). She noticed that its scene unfolds gradually: a solitary observer on a misty night begins to realize that something extraordinary is happening. Her reading helped him imagine how the music could tell that story.

As the score developed, Jeffrey and Rebecca sometimes met on Mondays, her day off, to go for coffee. He brought the latest music, and they listened together while she followed the score. Her enthusiasm offered encouragement as he worked through the cantata, movement by movement.

Matthew helped give the work its scale. Jeffrey had considered using string quartet to make performances more practical. Knowing that House of Hope would have a full string complement for Christmas Eve, Matthew encouraged him to use it.

"It didn't take much talking," Jeffrey said. The fuller sound was what he had wanted originally. The assurance of a performance also gave him a deadline. Other tasks began to give way to more hours with the music, until he reached what he calls his "dog with a bone" stage. "I just can't put it down," he said. "I just can't let go of that bone."

A journey from darkness into light

The cantata moves from winter's darkness toward the light and celebration of Christmas. A long orchestral introduction establishes the cold, unsettled world of the opening movement. "The air is brittle," Jeffrey said. Rossetti's poems are not all explicitly about Christmas, but their images of waiting and



renewal help carry the journey forward.

Matthew describes the relationship between the words and the music this way:

"Jeffrey is a storyteller. He's a composer who lives in the text so long before he writes it, who so thoughtfully has taken from two sources that don't walk hand in hand a lot, and constructed a really neat narrative. Then there's Jeffrey the musical storyteller: the way he can paint the scene with the instrumentation choices, the orchestral writing itself on top of the choral writing."

That storytelling begins with close attention to the text. Jeffrey reads and rereads the words, listening for their rhythm and deciding where a phrase needs space. The music follows those choices through shifting meters and moods.

The soprano solo, for example, only began to work when he reconsidered its celebratory text. After trying a more understated opening, he decided, "This movement needs to start with a bang."

He often writes directly for the orchestra, imagining the instruments as the music takes shape. The piano version used in choral rehearsals comes later. His experience as a guitarist helps him think about what each instrument does well and how to give its player something rewarding to perform.

Sharing the story on Christmas Eve

Jeffrey wrote the soprano and baritone solos with familiar singers in mind. "It makes a difference when you're writing if you're writing for a person whose voice you know," he said. His familiarity with House of Hope's musicians gave those parts a personal connection from the beginning.

> *Here now is Winter, Winter, after all,*
> *Leaves, flowers and fruit and one delightful song remain.*
> *These days are short, but now the nights intense and long,*
> *Hang out their utmost lights,*
> *Against that day when spring sets all to rights.*
>
> Christina Rossetti, *Later Life*, 1881

For the choir, Matthew anticipates the challenge of sustaining Jeffrey's long musical lines. "He writes long lines, and he asks choirs to sustain long ideas," he said. Keeping those phrases alive requires breath, attention, and continuity. Matthew also hears Jeffrey's experience as a guitarist in the harmonies, particularly in the spacing of notes.

Matthew also hears the work as a continuation of Advent at House of Hope. Its opening gathers up that season's darkness and anticipation before turning toward the celebration of Christmas. Beginning the service with the cantata offers what he calls "a true journey to Christmas here at the House of Hope."

Matthew sees the premiere as a fitting expression of House of Hope's commitment to art and its creation. "We get to tell the story Jeffrey has crafted, with some help from some others," he said. On Christmas Eve, Rebecca and her fellow singers will share that story with a congregation that has helped give it shape.

Jeffrey's hope is for an experience shared by everyone in the sanctuary:

"My goal would be that all of us, performers and listeners alike, would feel that we have experienced an authentic journey, one of reflection and beauty."

Jeffrey Van's *The Journey to Christmas* will be premiered at the 7:30 p.m. candlelight service on Christmas Eve, December 24.









Clockwise from top: In the Heart of the Beast Puppet Theater leads a parade, audience members listen to Erin Walsh discuss raising children in a digital world, a young poet takes part in the Poetry Slam, and Newbery Medal–winning author Kwame Alexander delivers a poetry reading and talk, encouraging writers of all ages to be courageous.

HOPE ARTS CENTER

JANUARY & FEBRUARY 2027

Tickets & Details:

Hope Arts Center Music lessons
Violin, Piano, Ukulele, Voice.
All ages. **Ongoing.**
Contact madelinec@hohchurch.org

Giving Voice Chorus
Rehearsal every Tuesday, 1-2:30pm
Kirk Parlour
Creating joyful choral communities for people living with dementia & their care partners.
New singers always welcome.
givingvoicechorus.org



January 9-February 27, Saturdays, 10:30am
Florestan Chamber Music Winter Festival
Hope Arts Center Artists-in-Residence 2026-2027
Kirk Parlour
Florestan brings eight Saturday morning concerts to House of Hope featuring chamber works of Beethoven, on the 200th anniversary of his death. Tickets: hohchurch.org/tickets

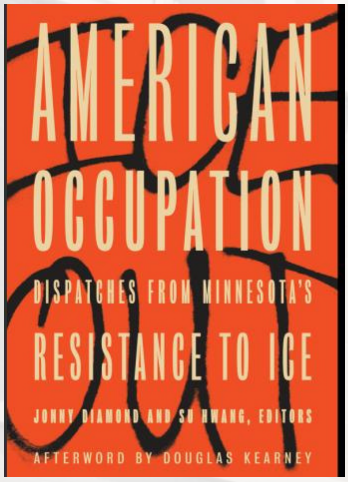








January 28, 6:30pm
Book Launch with University of Minnesota Press & the Loft Literary Center
Sanctuary
Join us for the launch of ***American Occupation: Dispatches from Minnesota's Resistance to ICE.***
An evening of readings and reflection to celebrate its publication and commemorate the anniversary of Operation Metro Surge.
FREE, Register: loft.org





January 30, 1pm
Hope Arts Salon
Kirk Parlour
Enjoy student performances. FREE

February 12, 7pm
Yamandu Costa
Sanctuary
Yamandu Costa brings his 7-string guitar, his fire, and his virtuosity to the US.
Ticket information coming soon.



September 15–November 20: *Journeys from the Journey*, a textile installation by Kip Beardsley, drew visitors from across our community.



September 27: Rev. Phillip Romine is installed as Associate Pastor for Spiritual and Community Care



September 21: Members attend the dedication of House of Hope s Peace Pole, a gift from former Interim Senior Pastor Scott Kenefake



October 4: House of Hope members line Summit Avenue to cheer runners in the Twin Citiies Marathon



Congregational Retreats

Rev. Phillip Romine

For most of us, "retreats" have come to mean an extended time to plan and work. This is nearly the exact opposite of what a retreat is supposed to be: a time to pull away from—not lean into—one's regularly scheduled life programming. I am happy to report that our congregational retreats at Clearwater Forest are, indeed, retreats.

The only "program" that has arisen during these times outside of time is gathering around a fire and sharing with one another. Everyone is invited—not expected—to share a part of themselves, and anyone can pass if they'd rather not share. Everyone is also invited—not expected—to share s'mores. It is liturgy ("the work of the people") done simply. Other rhythms that have arisen: impromptu walks through the woods, collaborative puzzling, intermittent snacking, indoor and outdoor fort-building, story-crafting with Elsa, and escaping to one's room to read, pray, and enjoy the simple gift of time God has given each of us. to enjoy.

Our next retreat will be June 6-8, 2027 at Clearwater Forest. Come join us as we practice together the chief end of humanity: to glorify God and enjoy God forever.

December for Children, Youth, and Families

Elsa Kending & Dr. Jimmy Hoke

Celebrate Advent at House of Hope with a cookie bake-off, Christmas parties, and fresh perspectives on familiar Bible stories.

December 6 · Great Advent Cookie Bake-Off
Families are invited to the Great Hall after worship for the Great Advent Cookie Bake-Off.

December 11 · Tween Christmas Party
Tweens will celebrate Christmas from 5:30 to 7 p.m. in Room 2 at House of Hope.

December 13 · Youth White Elephant Christmas Party
Come for cookies, time with friends, and a lively White Elephant exchange. Bring a wrapped gift to swap, and be ready for a little good-natured gift stealing! 6–8 p.m. in the Youth Room.

In Sunday School and Time for Children, we'll draw on Wilda Gafney's *Womanist Midrash* to explore stories from Genesis through Deuteronomy through the eyes of mothers and other women, including Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, Rachel, Hagar, and Miriam.

Watch for January and February Tween Night dates.

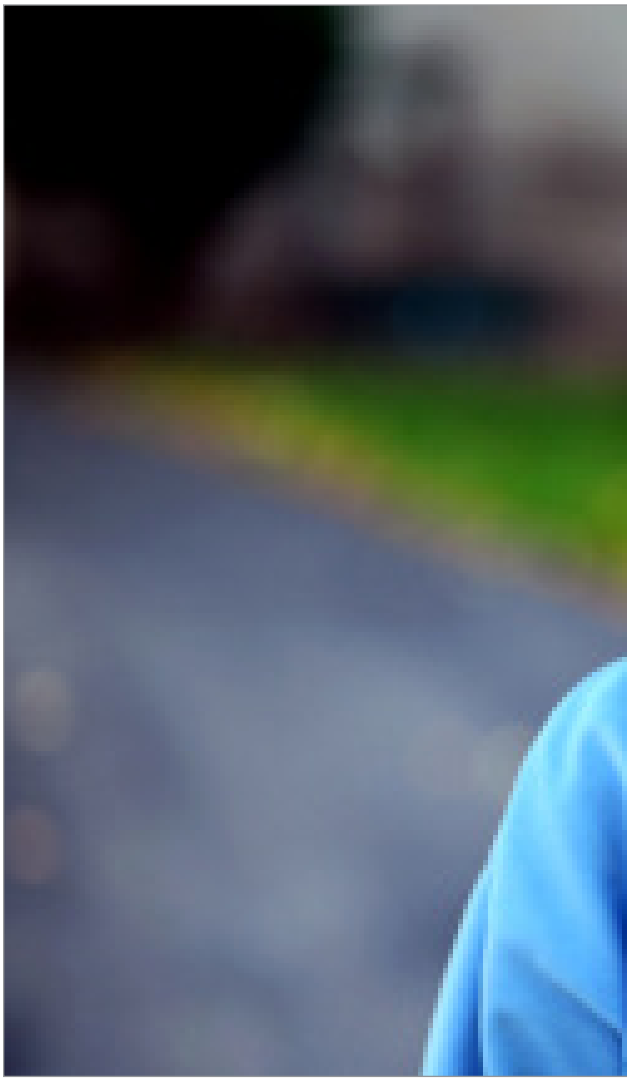
Sunday School Schedule

8:30–9:10 am: Breakfast Time	10:00–11:00 am: Worship Time
9:10–9:50 am: Education Time	11:15 am–12:00.p.m: Enrichment and Community Time



A Mind of Her Own

Pat Freeburg's life in computing, music, and community



The white gloves could come off. The hat and high heels stayed on.

Early in her IBM career, Pat sat on the floor at State Farm, with a large control panel in front of her. Her job was to move the wires into the correct positions. Around her, people politely ignored the young woman doing the repairs.

Pat remembers the scene with amusement. She knew her work; the dress code was simply another complication. Technical skill, independence, and humor have remained constants throughout her life.

Saint Paul roots, wider horizons

Her family's Saint Paul roots reach back to her great-grandfather, Robert A. Smith, who served in both houses of the Minnesota Legislature and became the city's mayor in 1887.

House of Hope has been part of Pat's life since childhood. Her mother's family worshiped there before her, and she remembers being sent to Sunday school from the family's house on Lincoln Avenue. In the children's choir, she wore a long black robe, black socks pulled over her shoes, and a little velvet beanie.

She attended Linwood and Central, then chose Macalester College, where her mother had studied. Her father, Mal Freeburg, paid her college expenses. A barnstormer who became a Northwest Airways pilot, he had made headlines long before his daughter embarked on her own unconventional career:

In 1930, while flying the mail, Pat's father spotted a burning railroad bridge. He swooped repeatedly across the path of an approaching train and dropped flares until the engineer brought it to a stop. Golfer Bobby Jones was aboard—a detail Pat credits with helping make the rescue famous. In another emergency, Freeburg maneuvered a damaged engine over the Mississippi River and brought his plane safely down. President Franklin D. Roosevelt presented him with the first Airmail Flyers' Medal of Honor in 1933.

> "I have the soul of a musician and no talent."

For Pat, the celebrated aviator was also the father she and her brother saw every Sunday. "He was very loyal to us and very good to us," she remembers.

Pat once imagined becoming an orchestral musician. She tried instrument after instrument: accordion, violin, mandolin, glockenspiel. As a girl, she held her father to his promise to buy her an accordion if she learned to play. After twelve weeks of lessons on a borrowed instrument, she demonstrated her progress. He supplied the full-sized accordion. At Macalester, she played bagpipes, serving as pipe major during her senior year.

"I have the soul of a musician and no talent," she says, with characteristic self-deprecation. Her persistence suggests that talent was never her only consideration.

> "I don't expect people to agree with me...but I am not going to keep silent."

By her junior year, she had turned to international relations. She wanted to travel. During her senior year, she took second- and third-year Russian simultaneously, learning the rules while tackling more advanced reading.

Then she joined IBM and wondered whether all that effort had been wasted.

Learning the business of computers

Pat began work at IBM on July 9, 1956. It was a world of wired control panels, punched cards, and customers who needed help understanding unfamiliar machines. Systems engineering demanded patience, practical ingenuity, and a willingness to keep learning.

Being a woman brought additional challenges. She remembers women being paid $50 less per month than men, along with the dress code requiring skirts, high heels, hats, and white gloves. IBM hired women without abandoning the assumptions of the time.

Those assumptions followed her into the classroom. Computer customers needed training, and their suppliers provided it. Pat taught men who knew how to manage departments but were confronting programming for the first time.

She recalls walking into her first class: thirty or forty white men, many in their forties, looking apprehensive. Her manager introduced their young, short instructor as "Patty."

She could read their expressions: if she could learn this, surely they could. It was confidence rooted in prejudice. But the person who could teach them was Pat.

Before a program ran, its instructions were written out and keypunched into cards. A single wrong digit could persist through every stage of preparation.

The work also required owning mistakes. At Brown and Bigelow, she once wrote a "two" where she needed a "one," directing an operation to the wrong tape drive. The error disrupted two systems and took hours to untangle. The breakthrough came when she noticed a supposedly inactive drive moving.

She tells the story without making excuses. Embarrassed, she found the mistake and tried never to repeat it. Knowing how to solve a problem did not mean being incapable of causing one.



Russian, after all

When she left college, Pat had a particular regret: "I'm never going to use my Russian."

"And then IBM sent me to the Soviet Union twice."

The first trip came in 1959, during the height of the Cold War. As Pat recalls it, the United States and Soviet Union arranged reciprocal exhibitions: a Soviet exhibition in New York and an American exhibition in Moscow. Her Russian, seemingly unrelated to her career, became the qualification that took her overseas.

> "And then IBM sent me to the Soviet Union—twice."

The exhibition lasted about six weeks, following the training in New York and another period of preparation in Moscow. The assignments came with strict instructions about conduct, especially for the women. Pat remembers warnings not to cry, stay out late, or pursue Russian men. The opportunity was extraordinary; the paternalism was unmistakable.

Once there, she had to converse in Russian. No longer a college exercise, the language she had worked so hard to learn was essential to her job.

Among her vivid memories is a small American house built for the exhibition. Soviet visitors, she recalls, found it difficult to believe that ordinary Americans did not all live in high-rise apartments. The house offered something concrete to look at and discuss: not simply a statement about America, but an example of daily life.

Her memories combine international politics with practical details, including having her own hotel room. History, for Pat, is also what it felt like to be there.

She returned to the Soviet Union in 1964. The Russian she had feared losing through disuse had opened an unexpected chapter in her IBM career, twice over.

Still learning, still ringing

Pat retired in July 1990, after thirty-four years at IBM. She negotiated her departure date so that she could pass her July 9 anniversary: a small adjustment, but a satisfying one for someone who likes things orderly.

Retirement did not end her interest in technology's consequences. She still questions whether convenience sometimes comes at the expense of conversation. For someone who spent a career helping people use machines, the distinction matters.

Music has remained another constant. After singing in House of Hope's choirs, she took up handbells there in 1979. Decades later, she is still thinking about counting, timing, dynamics, and the challenge of placing a single note exactly where it belongs.

> "If it's your community, by golly, you better try to make it better."

She is attentive to beginners, who must absorb several basics at once. Overwhelming them can be discouraging. Under Tim Short's direction, newcomers can participate without extensive experience: learn how to hold the bells, watch the director, and join in.

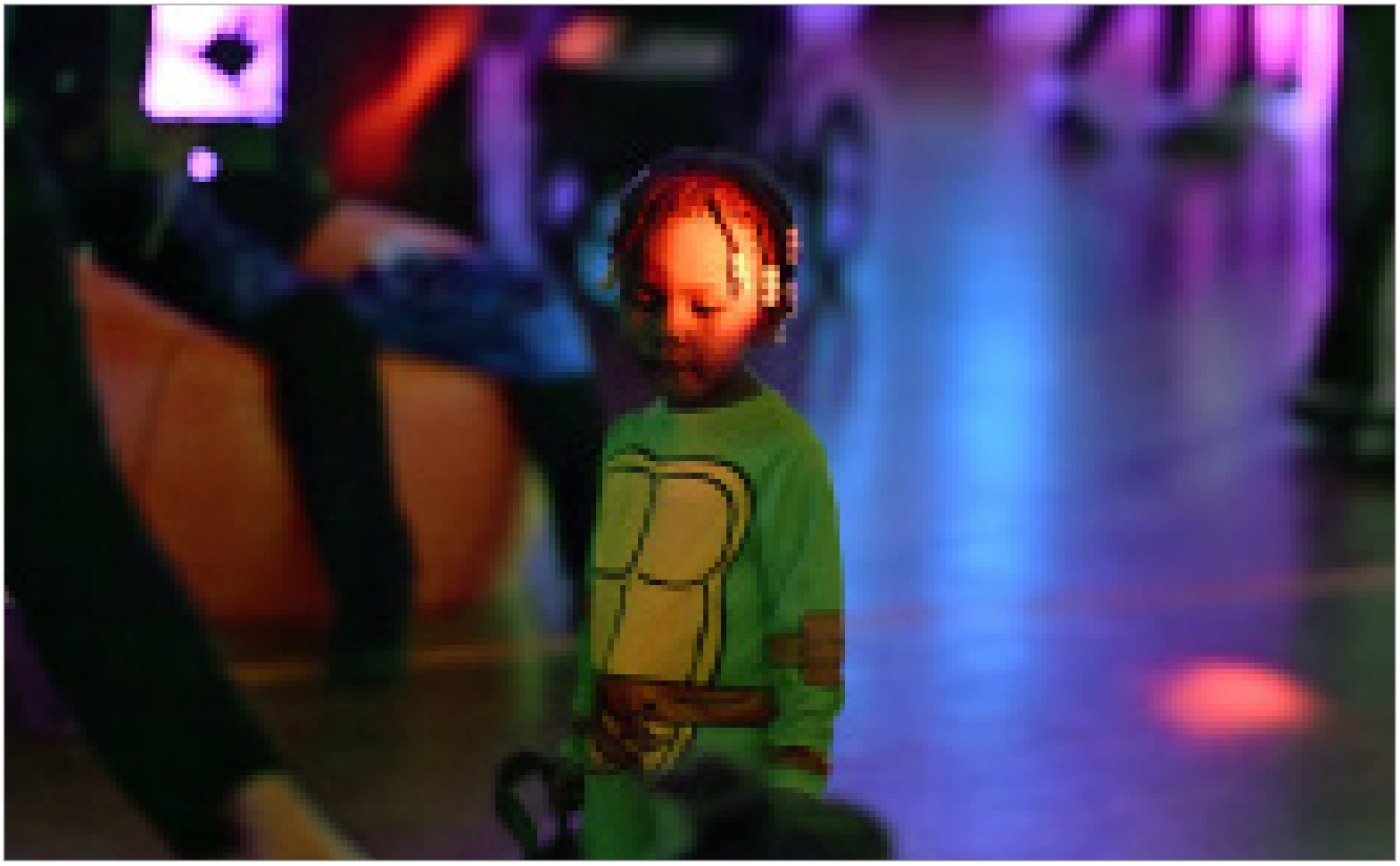
Of freer ringing, she offers a lovely description: "It's like ringing in the wind."

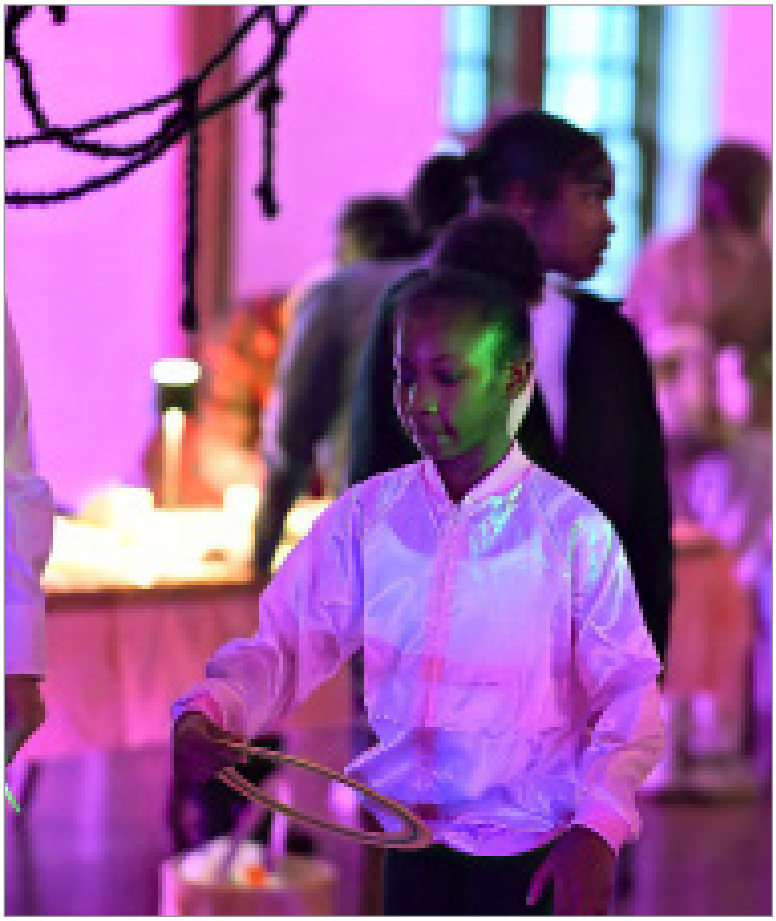
Across those same decades, she has watched House of Hope become more welcoming and inclusive. "It's amazing the progress I think House of Hope has made," she says. She values a community willing to grow, and she wants people to notice one another, begin conversations, and make room for those who might otherwise feel alone.

Her standard for belonging is an active one: "If it's your community, by golly, you better try to make it better."

It is a conviction that suits the woman on the floor beside the control panel: pay attention, understand what needs doing, and take part.









Above and opposite, some 200 revelers from our congregation and neighborhood joined the House of Hope Halloween Party for carnival games, crafts, and trick-or-treating. Thank you to our wonderful volunteers who made it all possible!

The Lives Behind the Stars

House of Hope's service flags preserve the memory of those who served—and the families who waited, and grieved

As the year marking the 250th anniversary of our nation's founding comes to a close, it seems fitting to pause before House of Hope's service flags, displayed in the Assembly Room, and to remember the people they represent: those who served, those who died, and the families who carried the burdens of separation, uncertainty, and loss. These banners connect our national history to the lives of those who once sat in our pews, shared in our worship, and called this congregation home.

The service flag tradition began during World War I, when Army Captain Robert L. Queisser designed a banner honoring his two sons in military service. Its simple arrangement—blue stars on a white field within a red border—became widely recognized. Each blue star represented someone serving in the armed forces. A gold star, often placed over a blue one, honored someone who had died in service, whether in battle or from illness or other causes.

Displayed in a household window, a service flag communicated something deeply personal to everyone passing by. It signaled a family waiting for news, hoping for a safe return, or grieving someone who would never come home. Behind that window, ordinary life continued alongside extraordinary uncertainty. Letters were read and reread; familiar routines unfolded around an empty chair. The expressions "Blue Star family" and "Gold Star family" grew from this tradition, giving communities a visible way to recognize and honor military service and its human cost.

Churches, schools, businesses, and other organizations also adopted service flags. Their banners brought individual experiences together, expressing the service and sacrifice of an entire community. For a congregation, each star represented someone known: a child raised in the church, a choir member, a friend, a neighbor, or a fellow worshiper whose absence was felt. The flags invited those at home to see themselves as connected to the people serving far away and to the families waiting beside them.

At House of Hope, the flags survive though the details of their origins have been lost. We know little about who commissioned them, who assembled their stars, or how they were first presented to the congregation. Their presence nevertheless bears witness to a community's desire to remember its members in uniform. Our World War I flag carries a single gold star, honoring Richard Ingoldsby Fitzpatrick. The eight gold stars on our World War II flag remind us of eight lives lost and of grief that reached into families, friendships, and the congregation itself.

Our remembrance also extends beyond the conflicts represented by these banners. Although House of Hope has no surviving service flags from Korea, Vietnam, or later wars, members of this congregation served—and some died—in those conflicts as well. The absence of a flag does not diminish their place in our shared history or the gratitude we owe them and their families. Their stories belong alongside those represented here, even when the surviving record is incomplete.

In this anniversary year, we remember with gratitude and humility. Two hundred fifty years of national history encompass both the ideals we cherish and the challenges of living together as a nation. These flags ask us to consider that history through individual lives. Behind every star was a person with relationships, aspirations, and a future that military service would shape or cut short. Preserving these banners invites us to preserve their stories, seek the names and experiences we have yet to recover, and listen to those who carry the burdens of service today. As a community of faith, we honor their sacrifice through remembrance, care for one another, and a continuing commitment to work for peace.



ONE STAR. ONE LIFE.

Richard Ingoldsby Fitzpatrick

Richard Ingoldsby Fitzpatrick is remembered by the sole gold star on House of Hope's World War I service flag. Born May 11, 1894 and baptized December 7, 1894 at House of Hope, he was training to become a pilot when he died at Camp Dick, Texas of pneumonia on March 26, 1918, aged twenty-three. It is not known whether his death was related to the emerging "Spanish Flu" epidemic. At the time of his death his two brothers were also serving: Philip, a lieutenant in the aviation corps in France, and John, ensign in the Navy. A church bulletin recorded his death, preserving a brief trace of the congregation's loss. His gold star honors a young life cut short, the family who mourned him, and a loss that remains part of our congregation's history.



Our Eight WWII Fallen

Eight gold starts. Eight lives held in the memory of this congregation.

Lieutenant Robert Stuart Clark
(died February 1, 1943, age 25) while serving on the destroyer USS DeHaven when it was sunk off Guadalcanal.

Lieutenant John H. Richardson
(died December 3, 1943, age 28) while serving with the 1st Special Service Force during the Battle of Monte la Difensa in central Italy

2nd Lieutenant Reid F. Fellows
(died December 7, 1943, age 24) while serving with the 82nd Fighter Group, 97th squadron, when he was lost off the coast of southern Italy.

2nd Lieutenant William H. McMillan
(died October 27, 1944, age 23). He was serving with the 7th Armored Division when he was killed during a fierce enemy counter-attack near Ospel, Netherlands.

Lieutenant Richard Thorne Angell
(died March 19, 1945, age 33) while serving on the aircraft carrier USS Franklin in the Pacific theater.

Pfc. Robert D. Sinclair
(died November 16, 1944, age 20). While serving with the 411th Infantry Regiment, he was killed in the battle for the Taintrux Valley in northeastern France.

Lt Cdr George Dabney Gray Miller
(died December 8, 1945, age 34) while piloting a military transport plane full of overseas veterans on their way to the West Coast for discharge.

Lieutenant Allan Wendall Garlick
(died March 12, 1944, age 20). A bomber pilot, he was declared missing over New Guinea; he was officially declared dead on January 19, 1946 and his remains were only recovered in 1970.



THE ANCHOR

Periodicals
St Paul, MN

THE ANCHOR (Pub. No. 011-331)
is published quarterly by the
House of Hope Presbyterian Church,
797 Summit Avenue, St Paul MN 55105-3392

Periodicals postage paid at St Paul, MN

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:
THE ANCHOR, 797 Summit Avenue
St Paul, MN 55105-3392

As part of House of Hope's commitment as an Earth Care Congregation, The Anchor is printed on paper containing post-consumer recycled content.

The House of Hope Presbyterian Church is a Stephen Ministry Church.

COVENANT NETWORK OF PRESBYTERIANS

The House of Hope Presbyterian Church is a Covenant Network Congregation.



Members of House of Hope cheer in support of Twin Cities Marathon runners on Marathon Sunday 2026