



Welcome to the Hilltop Spire

First Presbyterian Church of Mendham, NJ

Advent and Christmas at Hilltop

December 3rd - The First Sunday of Advent

Family Advent wreath making with a light brunch immediately following worship. All supplies will be provided.

4 pm - All Church Fellowship Bowling Night Event at Pastime lanes.

December 10th- The Second Sunday of Advent

5 pm - Fellowship Holiday Dinner and Caroling

December 13th - Lunch with Friends

Holiday lunch with HCNS pageant and Santa

Dec 16th - Music on the Hill

7 pm in Fellowship Hall

December 17th - The Third Sunday of Advent

Hilltop Christmas Concert at 4:00 p.m.

"Infant Holy, Infant Lowly"

December 21st - Longest Night Service

7pm in the Sanctuary

December 24th - The Fourth Sunday of Advent Christmas Eve

10:00 am Regular Worship

4:00 pm Children's Service with Pageant

Christmas Candlelight Service

7:30 p.m. Special Music in the Sanctuary

8:00 p.m. Service in the Sanctuary

Merry Christmas from the Hilltop Staff!

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MARK YOUR CALENDAR
THE HILLTOP CHRISTMAS
CONCERT SUNDAY, DECEMBER
17TH AT 4 PM

NEXT ISSUE:

Articles for the **Winter Issue (January/February)** of the Spire are due to the church office by **January 10th!** If possible please submit articles by email to office@hilltopchurch.org. The Hilltop Spire is available online at www.hilltopchurch.org

CONTACT US AT HILLTOP:

Call us at 973-543-4012 or

Fax us at 973-543-0958.

From the Pastor

15When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." 16So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. 17When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; 18and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. 19But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. 20The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Luke 10:15-20

There are lots of stirring moments through the course of a church year. Each one grabs us in different ways, from the sense of thankful determination arising from Jesus' baptism and temptation in the wilderness to the pure agape love emanating from every word he speaks; from the heartbreak of Good Friday to the glory of Easter morning. And that's just the first few months of the year. But for me, the most beautiful and moving time of the year is the moment we are in this week – the week of transition from Christ the King Sunday to the first Sunday of Advent; the beginning of a new church year.

This last month or so our worship readings reflect a time that was as complex and fraught as our own. Jesus has been preparing his followers (including us) to carry on in his absence. At the same time, he's bringing truth to power every day in the town square, proclaiming justice and love in the face of his opponents' insistence on rules and tradition. Jesus, and we, know that he has reached the end of his ministry; that he will be falsely accused and crucified by week's end. It's exhausting. The stakes are high. The tension is palpable. And the climax comes suddenly. With Easter knowledge, we jump straight from our Savior's fierce proclamations on the streets of Jerusalem to his eternal, redeeming, Kingship; to the promise that he will return!

Then it ends. The dramatic tension and cathartic climax wane, while the faint echo, "Crucify him!" is still dying in our ears. And we begin preparing, once again and as always, for the arrival of Jesus Christ. The returning King of the universe. The infant of the incarnation. This is a pure moment. A moment of possibility; of renewal. Advent is a time to relax and start over, to invite Christ to arrive in our own hearts, to change our own lives, and to show us the way when he comes. Then we wait. We prepare.

Being members or leaders of any church these days often feels like that last month or so of Jesus' ministry. It's complex, troubling, and exhausting. We have so many priorities and not enough hands to make them happen. There's the constant uneasiness that comes with limited funds, as well as the continuing social trend away from community organizations like church. The stakes are high. The tension is palpable. My friends, it's time for some Advent renewal. I invite you to prayerfully meditate on letting go of the bustling unease that settles upon us all. Prepare to receive Jesus as the shepherds did – filled with the wonderful awe of the moment. And nothing else. Your Savior is coming to see you. Prepare to greet him and to follow him with a light step and a joyful heart.

See You on Sunday,

Pastor Scot

Our Life in Service and Mission...

GIVE A GIFT OF SHELTER

The Hilltop Mission Committee invites you to Give a Gift of Shelter this Christmas! As the innkeeper gave Mary and Joseph a place to stay, let us give shelter to a Morris County neighbor in need, through our mission partner: Family Promise of Morris County.

Hilltop Church has worked with Family Promise of Morris County for over 5 years. Family Promise provides temporary shelter and social services for those experiencing homelessness. Our partnership started with hosting Family Promise clients in the Hilltop Christian Nursery School for one week during the summer. During the Covid-19 epidemic, Family Promise pivoted to using a motel-based housing strategy. Hilltop Church embraced that pivot, continuing to provide support through home-cooked meals, groceries, and gift cards.

The cost of housing a family in the motel is \$80 per day or \$560 per week. Our hope is to collect enough money to fund a week of shelter. Donations can be made using the QR code below, through Breeze under the "Give a Gift of Shelter" category, by check made out to Hilltop Church with "Give a Gift of Shelter" on the memo line, or in cash. For every donation made you will receive a votive candle and a custom Christmas card that states "A gift has been given in your honor to Family Promise of Morris County to help provide shelter to a family in need." The candle and Christmas card will be available for pickup on December 10th and 17th, after worship. For any questions, please contact Debbie Buchanan at vdbuchanan@msn.com.

Please consider giving generously so the Hilltop Church family can ensure that a neighbor in need stays warm and dry for at least one week this winter.

WHAT BRINGS YOU CHRISTMAS JOY?

As we approach the season of Advent and Christmas, there are so many directions that we are pulled that we sometimes forget what brings us joy at Christmas. It is a time when we count our blessings and share our gifts with others.

In particular, Presbyterians are given the opportunity through the Christmas Joy special offering to support the financial needs of retired, current and future church leaders and workers and to support leadership development in Presbyterian-backed schools and colleges, specifically to equip communities of color.

Imagine the joy of a student receiving financial assistance to attend Stillman College in Tuscaloosa, Alabama which was founded in 1876 by Presbyterians and Rev. Dr. Charles Allen Stillman and is a training school for African-American ministers. The student's chance to fulfill this dream may not have been possible without the assistance.

Imagine the joy of a student receiving a scholarship for the Menaul School, a PC (USA) affiliated grade 6-12 college preparatory school in Albuquerque, New Mexico in which students of many backgrounds, especially the nearby Navajo community, learn and grow in faith.

Imagine the joy of a retired church worker that needs financial assistance to make monthly housing payments rather than facing eviction.

During Advent, Christmas Joy offering can be made through the special envelopes in the pews or entrance to the sanctuary as well as online through Breeze. Checks can be written with Christmas Joy offering in the memo line.

Please consider contributing to the Christmas Joy offering and find a little "Christmas Joy" in your heart. Thank you.

Thank you

The Mendham Interfaith Community Thanksgiving Food Drive is a wrap! With your help, we collected **35 turkeys and other frozen and non-perishable foods for a total donation of 1153 pounds!** Thanks to Lily Lowe, Lisa Lowe, Mike Whiting, and Wendy Whiting for manning the collection and delivering the food to IFPN. Given that the Interfaith Food Pantry Network expects to give away 2400 Thanksgiving meals, our contributions are greatly needed and appreciated! Thank you for making someone's Thanksgiving a little brighter!



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION UPDATE...

December Update for Children, Youth and Families

by Stefanie Fox

Our Christian Education committee continues to work on ways to reach our Hilltop families and keep them connected to our congregation. We are also actively looking to fill our Director of Family Ministry position, so please pass along names of anyone you may feel is qualified for the role!

Sunday School:

Sunday School meets during worship, after the Time with Children portion of the service, in the Fletcher Room. Stay tuned to your email for reminders on each week's lesson and meeting details!

Christmas Pageant:

We are having our annual Christmas pageant! The "No Fuss, No Tears" pageant will be held during the 4 pm family service on December 24th. Please come and participate in the simple retelling of the beautiful story of Jesus' birth. We will hold the one and only rehearsal on December 17th during worship. The pageant rehearsal and Jesus' Birthday Party will be at 10 am in Fellowship Hall at Hilltop House on Dec 17. We will pass out reader assignments/scripts and roles for the pageant. We will have lots of fun and breakfast foods! HCNS will be invited to participate also. Please invite your friends and their families to the rehearsal/party and our Christmas Pageant too! We would love to have as many children as possible! All are welcome!

Keep an eye out for opportunities for a drop off time for children where they can enjoy a lesson, food, and fellowship in a casual atmosphere. Our committee is working on details for these types of events in the near future.

This year's **Confirmation Class** is rolling along with 3 confirmands. These young men meet with Pastor Scot and a guest from the Session or Deacon board for thoughtful education and discussion.

Our **3rd grade Communion, Bible & Worship class** will meet in winter of 2024. Stay tuned for emails about start dates and schedule.

Vacation Bible School will be at Hilltop House the week of June 17-21, 2024! We will have a morning full of VBS curriculum and then afternoon enrichment add-on classes all week. It will be a fun, exciting week for children in grades K-5. We look forward to everyone in our congregation joining forces to volunteer their time and help execute a wonderful week of Christian education and fellowship!

May you all experience faith, hope, and beauty during this Advent season. Our prayers are with our Hilltop families daily and we welcome you always with open hearts and arms.

Honor the memory of your loved ones this Holiday Season with these new offerings from the Hilltop Cemetery



The **CEMETERY CONE** has evergreen branches decorated with a bow plus 2 white branches, 2 pinecones and a decorative ball.

The **MEDIUM PREMIUM GRAVE BLANKET** will be constructed of evergreen branches. This blanket has a dome shape that is 10" - 14" high with a base approximately 20" x 12". Greens are supplemented with 4 white branches, 3 pinecones, 3 decorative balls and a bow.

The **LARGE PREMIUM GRAVE BLANKET** will be constructed of evergreen branches. This blanket has a dome shape that is 10" - 14" high with an approximate 32" x 15" base. Greens are supplemented with 8 white branches, 4 pine cones, 4 decorative balls and 2 bows.

The **LARGE LUXURY GRAVE BLANKET** will also be constructed of evergreen branches enhanced with 3 ferns. This dome shaped blanket is between 10" and 14" high and has an approximate 32" x 15" base. This blanket has 4 pinecones, and 4 decorative balls added to the Large Premium Blanket.

Order on-line at <https://www.hilltopcemetery.com>

Orders received by December 1 will be installed by December 10.

*For your convenience prices include installation and removal.

OUR FELLOWSHIP LIFE...

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION FOR ADULTS AT HILLTOP CHURCH

Women's Bible Study Group - Thursday mornings in the Hilltop House Library from 9:45-11:30 am

Men's Bible Study Group - Saturday mornings in the Hilltop House Library from 8:30-10:00 am

Adult Education - Sundays immediately after Church in the Hilltop House parlor and tries to wrap up its meetings by around 12:30. On the final Sunday of each month there's no formal meeting and, instead, we typically meet at the Blackhorse Pub for fellowship and brunch. We hope you'll join us.

ALL-CHURCH BOWLING AT PASTIME LANES

Sunday, December 3rd from 4:00-6:00 PM

Two whole hours with the bowling lanes to ourselves! We'll meet at Hilltop House at 3:50 and walk over to Pastime Lanes together. Bring \$10 to help cover pizza. BYO adult beverages.

MUSIC ON THE HILL

Join us on Saturday, December 16, at 7PM for coffee, hot chocolate, snacks, and holiday tunes. Our featured artists will be Hilltop's own - Megan Pepper and Laura Grzanka. Bring your family and friends and get in the holiday mood! Donations will support our mission partners who are fighting food insecurity this holiday season. If you are interested in sponsoring Music on the Hill, performing, or volunteering, please email musiconthehilltop@gmail.com.

UPCOMING SECOND SUNDAY FELLOWSHIP

 **Mark Your Calendar**



Sunday, December 10 at 5:00
Hilltop House, 14 Hilltop Rd, Mendham

Christmas Potluck and Carol Sing

Get into the Christmas spirit with good food and fellowship!



Sunday - January 14
5:00 pm
Hilltop House
14 Hilltop Rd, Mendham

Hit us with your best shot! **Win Prizes!**



Register in advance by following the QR code OR contact the church office at (973) 543-4012 or office@hilltopchurch.org.

KARAOKE and PAINT Night

February 11 @ 4:30 - 6:30 PM

HILLTOP HOUSE FELLOWSHIP HALL
14 HILLTOP RD | MENDHAM NJ 07845
hilltopchurch.org

ENTRY FEE \$35 PER PERSON Covers Everything!

Our Deacon's News...

Christmas blessings to all from the Hilltop Board of Deacons!

Christmas Lovelines

The Hilltop Deacons are partnering with the Center for Family Services this Christmas season so that some families in Morris County can provide their children with Christmas gifts. As we have done in years past, there will be a Christmas tree with angel tags located in the Fletcher room. The tags will have the child's gender, age and 2 requested gifts. Please keep purchases around \$50.00 per child. The gifts will be dedicated during the December 10th worship service. Please bring your gifts with you. If you are not able to attend the service, please drop off during the prior week at Hilltop House. The gifts do not need to be wrapped. Attach your angel tag to the outside of the bag. If you would prefer to purchase gift cards, please use Walmart or Target for \$50.00. Thank you for helping us to make the Christmas season merry!

Lunch with Friends

The Lunch with Friends Christmas luncheon will be held on Wednesday December 13th with a delicious holiday meal. Coffee, fruit, and snacks are available starting at 11 am and lunch is served at 12 noon in Fellowship Hall. Volunteers are needed to bring food, set-up, serve, and clean up. Please contact Paula Raimondo with any questions or to volunteer. This is always a lovely opportunity to gather together as a community. Please join us! All are welcome!

Hilltop Christian Nursery School Update... by Victoria Legacki, Director

How blessed we are at Hilltop Christian Nursery School to spend our days surrounded by children. This Christmas season, I would like to give a special thank you to the team of teachers we are so fortunate to have guiding and teaching our children in preschool. Our teachers are patient, dedicated, hard working and most of all loving and nurturing to the children. Seeing them in action always inspires me to be a better version of myself. If you see a staff member this Christmas season, please be sure to tell them what a blessing they are to our community.

Our preschoolers had a delicious feast together in Fellowship Hall before breaking for Thanksgiving. Each class prepared a special food to contribute and our plates were filled with grapes, turkey, cheese, muffins, cookies, popcorn, pumpkin pie tarts and trail mix. The two year old classes had their first visit to the chapel to sing and pray with the three and four year olds before heading to their special meal together dressed as Native Americans and Pilgrims.

We look forward to singing for our seniors at Lunch with Friends and performing our town-famous Christmas Pageant! Spread the word to your senior friends to join us on December 12th for our dress rehearsal. It is always a show that brings a tear to my eye and reminds me just what the Christmas season is all about- I know it will warm your heart, too.

From all of us at Hilltop Christian Nursery School, we wish you a very merry and blessed Christmas season.



Stewardship...

The **2024 Stewardship campaign** has begun. This year's theme is "Restore to me the joy of salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me." Taken from the 51st Psalm.

Dedication Sunday is December 3rd. If you would like to learn more about the finances of the church and the stewardship campaign, please speak with a member of the Finance Ministry.

For your convenience, online giving is available through Breeze our church database. If you need any assistance with you Breeze log-in please call the church office (973)543-4012.



Eye On Stewardship *From The Finance & Stewardship Area of Ministry*

Presented in the table below are the four-month results for the fiscal year which began July 1, 2023 and results for the prior two fiscal years. For those of you who are careful readers of this report, you will note that the message has not changed since our November report. We continue to see the same trends in our financial results. For four months of the year, Total Income of \$106k reflected a significant decrease of \$47k from the prior period total of \$153k. Pledge Income continued to decline, from \$119k two years ago, to \$105k last year to \$90k this year, representing a significant 24% decrease over two years. And as noted in previous reports, last year's results included the receipt of funds from a very generous bequest, which greatly boosted All Other income. The continuing decline in Pledge Income remains a concern as this is the key driver of the Church's financial health.

Turning to Expenditures, our largest expense categories are Personnel and Buildings & Grounds. Though not shown in the table, for the first four months of the year, Personnel Expenses were up a nominal \$4k, from \$95k last year to \$99k this year, although Personnel expenses remain on-track with our budget. On the plus side, Buildings & Grounds expenses declined substantially from a year ago as we have not incurred significant expense for Church repairs. We appreciate that all areas of ministry continue to carefully manage expenses. As a result of the above factors, the Church reported a Net Loss of -\$21k for the first four months of this year.

As we contemplate the season of stewardship, we ask that all church members support Hilltop to the best of their ability. Through our gifts to Hilltop Church, we can continue to fund the work that God calls us to do both here locally as well as in the broader world community.

4 MONTHS JULY 1 - OCT 31	2023 (000)	2022 (000)	2021 (000)
INCOME			
PLEDGE	\$90	\$105	\$119
ALL OTHER	\$16	\$48	\$12
TOTAL	\$106	\$153	\$131
EXPENSE	\$127	\$170	\$103
NET GAIN OR LOSS	\$21	\$17	\$28

MARK YOUR CALENDAR: DECEMBER 2023/ JANUARY 2024

December 17th - Christmas Choral Concert

December 24th - Christmas Pageant

January 1st - New Year/ Epiphany Communion

January 14th - Chili Cook-off

SAVE THE DATE:

February 11th- Karaoke and Paint Fellowship Event

February 11th- SouperBowl of Caring Sunday

February 13th - Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper

THE HILLTOP CHRISTMAS CONCERT DECEMBER 17TH

The Hilltop Presbyterian Church Annual Christmas Concert will be held on Sunday, December 17, 2023, beginning at 4:00 pm in the sanctuary.

The concert will feature an assortment of choral pieces and carols for the Christmas Season. The music will be accompanied by full orchestra – plus the handbell choir, along with the sanctuary organ.

This year's concert is titled, "Infant Holy, Infant Lowly," and will feature some of the great carols and compositions associated with the birth of Christ.

In addition to the prepared works, the concert will also include some favorite Christmas Carols for the audience to enjoy and sing.

Tickets are on sale for this event. Adult tickets cost \$20, and student ticket are \$10. Live stream link for the event is also available for \$30. Patrons are also welcome. Again this year, a \$200 Patronage will also earn you reduced price tickets to the concert. Tickets and Patrons will be available after the Church Service each Sunday leading up to the concert. This promises to be a sold-out event, so get your tickets early!

Tickets and Patrons are currently on sale in the Choir Room and in the church office at Hilltop House.

UPCOMING CONCERT SERIES PERFORMANCES

**Sunday, January 21st @3:00 pm - Organ Transcriptions, Part II
James Wynne, Organist**

Orchestral music not written for the organ but played on the instrument anyway!

Saturday, February 24th @ 7:00 pm - The Yale 'Spizzwinks(?)'
Established 1914 - The Oldest Undergraduate A Cappella Ensemble in the United States

CHRISTMAS POINSETTIAS

Your generosity makes it possible to decorate our church for Christmas. Your contribution in any amount may be given in memory or honor of loved ones and will be acknowledged in the bulletin if you so choose. **Flower Forms are available below the name tags in the Narthex or at Hilltop House now through December 10th.** Thank you! Forms should be returned to the church office by December 11th.

Please mark checks with "Poinsettias" In the memo.

The Hilltop Presbyterian Church presents
The Annual Christmas Concert
"Infant Holy, Infant Lowly"



Featuring:
The Hilltop Oratorio Choir, Orchestra, Organ,
and Handbell Choir
James A. Wymie, Conductor

Sunday Afternoon, December 17, 2023 at 4:00 pm
Tickets: 20.00 Adults, \$10.00 Students and Children (Under 7 are Free)
Call: 973-543-4012 for Ticket Information

