

Select Page



Alternative Advent

This year's Advent is different, but here are safe ways you can still celebrate this joyful season

Dec 2, 2020 | Arkansas United Methodist



Take home Advent kit from First UMC in Little Rock. Photo courtesy of Lesley Andrews.

By Caleb Hennington

Digital Content Editor



This year, the season of Advent begins on Nov. 29 and goes through Dec. 24. Although churches are taking more precautions than ever before to keep their congregations safe from the coronavirus, that doesn't mean that the joyous time of Advent can't be celebrated in new and inspiring ways.

With cases continuing to rise in Arkansas, Bishop Mueller **recently issued new safety guidelines** that encouraged congregations to continue wearing masks, keeping a safe distance from each other, and sanitizing every surface.

These continued precautions mean that Advent services at your church will most likely not be as packed as they have in the past. Many churches are having to think back to what they did for Easter services to figure out an Advent service strategy.

At First UMC Little Rock, the church leadership decided the safest way for many in their congregation to celebrate Advent this year was through a take-home Advent kit.

Their take-home Advent kit includes everything you need to celebrate Advent at home, including candles to make your own Advent wreath. The wreath can be lit at home during the Advent worship service each Sunday.

There is also a daily devotional book written by the staff and pastors of First UMC, to ensure that you stay connected to the message and importance of the Advent season.

Instructions for making a craft Christmas ornament, activities for kids and special treats are also included in the kits, to continue the fun after the lessons are done.

"Our hope is that these kits will help our community create an atmosphere of holy waiting in their homes, so that come Christmas morning they may experience the light of Christ in profound, world-changing ways," said the Rev. Brittany Richardson Watson, associate pastor at First UMC.

In addition to the kits, First UMC will be holding various Advent-themed events throughout the month of December, leading up to Christmas Eve.

Richardson Watson said the church has lots of virtual and at-home events planned, including a virtual Christmas choir special, virtual flower arranging classes, and baking classes. The baking class that she is hosting, "Tastes of Christmas," will meet via Zoom to discuss the meaning of various traditional Christmas treats that Richardson Watson will deliver to homes before the meeting.

First UMC Little Rock has decided not to host an in-person Christmas Eve service this year, but between 9 a.m. and 11 p.m. on Christmas Eve, there will be a variety of different virtual events — like worship, music and communion — that anyone in the community can join.



Camp Tanako and Ferncliff's Advent-In-A-Box kits. Photo courtesy of Kayla Hardage.



Inside the Camp Tanako and Ferncliff's Advent-In-A-Box kit. Lots of lessons, crafts and games can be found inside. Photo courtesy of Kayla Hardage.

Camp Tanako, a United Methodist camp located in Hot Springs, Arkansas, partnered with Ferncliff, a non-profit camp and retreat organization located outside of Little Rock, for their own version of the Advent box.

Called the **Advent-In-A-Box**, this take-home kit has four sections of activities to participate in, one for each of the four weeks of Advent. There are two versions of the boxes, one for

families and one for older adults, and each section in the box contains an advent scripture story, reflection questions, and a prayer.

But it's not all lessons and scriptures; there are also games, crafts and activities for each section that help to tie the message together.

Kayla Hardage, Executive Director of Camp Tanako, said the idea for the Ferncliff partnership came about after Ferncliff's Executive Director Joel Gill reached out to her.

"Ferncliff had partnered with a camp in Texas for their Camp-In-A-Box this past summer, and that program was successful. Tanako (Methodist) and Ferncliff (Presbyterian) are both American Camp Association Accredited and through the years have worked together in staff sharing and training opportunities.

"Joel was one of the first people to reach out and introduce himself when I started at Tanako. I am very excited about our relationship moving forward," Hardage said.

Hardage said the idea for Advent-In-A-Box was developed by a staff member from Ferncliff. In addition to activities and games for each week, there is a special gift from Tanako and Ferncliff that should be opened on Christmas Day.

The goal for the event was for each camp to sell a combined 1,500 boxes, which Hardage said they were able to do. Money raised from the sale of boxes were used to benefit both camps, which lost a large portion of their revenue by not having overnight camps this summer.

Methodist Family Health, which offers counseling and grief services for children ages 3 to 17, were able to buy 100 of the Advent boxes for their kids, thanks to generous donations from the Methodist Foundation for Arkansas and others.

"We are very excited about our Methodist Family Health kids receiving boxes, as they were not able to come to camp this summer," Hardage said.

For many, the most memorable part of the Advent season is their church's Christmas Eve service.

If your church plans to have a smaller service, or no in-person service at all this year, [Resource UMC](#) has some helpful ideas for alternative ways to celebrate Christmas Eve this year.

Some of the activities they suggest include hosting a drive-in Christmas movie by having people tune to an FM station in their cars, creating a drive-through or walk-through Christmas scene (with Christmas lights, music, a Nativity scene, etc.), and planning a socially distance Christmas carol event in your church's parking lot.

You can also encourage people to stay home with their families and celebrate Christmas instead of traveling out. To help them feel connected to your church, even while home,

send out care packages with fun activities and lessons so families can celebrate the Advent season with their loved ones.

Whatever you and your family choose to do this Advent season, remember that this time of the year is about celebrating the coming of Jesus, the need for all of us to receive forgiveness, and the remembrance of a new beginning.

“While this entire year has been filled with heartbreaking challenges, continuing to socially distance as we approach the seasons of Advent and Christmas is especially difficult for our church family. However, at the end of the day, whether we gather or not, come Christmas Jesus is still born, Emmanuel, God with us,” Richardson Watson said.

Share this:

Archives

[December 2020](#)[November 2020](#)[October 2020](#)[September 2020](#)[August 2020](#)[July 2020](#)[June 2020](#)[May 2020](#)[April 2020](#)[March 2020](#)[February 2020](#)[January 2020](#)