



I commend this congregation for their commitment and tenacity. It's a small fellowship with older members, but they continue to make a big difference in the community.

#### **East Greenbush UMC**

Christmas is a time of many church traditions, and this year is no different. The Blue Christmas Tree service wasn't held, but the blue Christmas tree is in the sanctuary with the names of people to be remembered, people for whom Christmas can be so very sad. The Sunday school and youth of the church are holding a live drive-by nativity with recorded music and luminaries on the afternoon of the 24th of December. The live streamed Christmas Eve candle-light service will occur with music, scripture, love, and

joy.

Cookies and Carols was also a staple for the church community, a time to gather to sing carols, munch on cookies, hear stories of Christmas and listen to great music. This year, with herculean effort, a two-hour program of music, poetry, and readings will be posted on Facebook on Dec. 20 at 3 p.m. in the afternoon. Each contribution was recorded separately and edited together to create a program for all to hear in their homes while munching cookies. The program will be available throughout the holiday season.

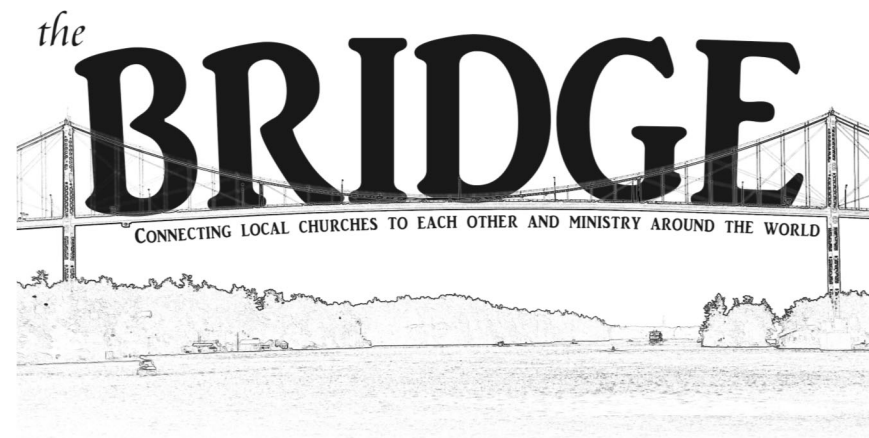
#### **East Randolph UMC**

East Randolph UMC performed their live nativity for people to drive by three different evenings during the Advent season.

*The Bridge is a Conference Communications Ministry tool that delivers to local churches news and stories of ministry from around the Upper New York Conference and the world. For more news and stories visit:*

**[www.unyumc.org](http://www.unyumc.org)**

This is the final issue of the *Bridge* in 2020. The *Bridge* will resume publication the week before the third Sunday in January, 2021.



The Upper New York Conference's vision is to live the gospel of Jesus Christ and to be God's love with our neighbors in all places.

## A look inside!

Keeping Christmas traditions alive in UNY

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# Keeping Christmas traditions alive in UNY

COVID-19 has been a challenging time for all churches. What are Upper New York churches doing to preserve the Christmas spirit, to keep their traditions of celebrating Christ's birth alive?!

Here are some unique ways that UNY churches, large and small, are keeping their Christmas traditions alive amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Visit <https://bit.ly/2020unychristmas> for more inspiring stories of ways in which UNY churches are celebrating Christmas.

## Asbury First UMC

By Holly Temming, Director of Children's Music/Children's Ministry Assistant

Asbury First United Methodist Church

is a warm, open faith community of 2,300 people in the city of Rochester, NY. The church's normal Christmas Season is vibrant and packed full of traditions such as decorating the sanctuary and campus, Cocoa and Carols Around the Tree, Advent Labyrinth accompanied by live harp, Christmas Dinner served to those in need and weekly Advent Taize services to name a few. But one of the most beloved traditions at Asbury First is a children's Christmas pageant that takes place during one of their five Christmas Eve services and is attended by approximately 1,000 people. How could they begin to replace a service full of candlelight and carols, handbell choir and or-



gan, angels skipping down the aisle, wisemen following a moving star and Mary and Joseph traveling with a live donkey down a long cathedral aisle? In late November, as their city entered an orange zone due to COVID, gatherings of more than 10 were prohibited and it was quite clear Christmas Eve services would not be happening this year. But in spite of restrictions there had to be a way to let the children tell the Christmas story in a safe way.

So, on a cold brisk day in late November, about 50 eager little children from Asbury First gathered in small, staggered groups at two local farms to re-enact the Christmas story with a film crew capturing each moment. In full costumes with coordinated masks, the shepherds wandered the fields, the herald angels sang atop a hill, and the wisemen traveled with alpaca from afar to present gifts before the blessed family in a manger surrounded by goats and donkeys. Dressing up to tell the story of Christ's birth is one of the greatest joys for children at Asbury First and to have it happen in a real manger this year instead of a sanctuary brought the story to life in a thrilling way. Paula Dugan, Director of Children's Ministry, said "I'm afraid the children will want to do this every year!" Harper Temming, a 10-year old who played one of the Wiseman, had not participated in the pageant in years because he's shy but had no hesitation participating this year because he said "there's no live audience and I get to play with farm animals!" The video will be released for online viewing at 4 p.m. on Christmas Eve and can be

accessed at [www.asburyfirst.org](http://www.asburyfirst.org).

## Avon First UMC

By Pastor Mia Richardson

Albeit this year has been challenging, we at the Avon United Methodist Church still have good news! From the onset of COVID-19, we remain intentional about the mission of the Church. We discern that Worship's paradigm has shifted, so we have chosen to flow with the Holy Spirit and think outside the box to keep our traditions alive!

Our worship team will be prerecording for the very first time our Christmas Eve Service for a virtual experience. Our affiliate Lay Servant Rachel Giso has created an outdoor weekly Advent Vigil service, which takes place in the Church's back parking lot. The service consists of lighting the candles, hearing an inspiring message, singing Christmas carols, and prayer. We offer both in-person and online participation for the weekly vigils, and they are well attended.

We will also gather online for a virtual Christmas party. This is a Zoom gathering for holiday trivia, prizes, conversation, music, and fun. Our Heart of Ruth, Women's Ministry and the congregation are still donating gifts to young families and their children, collecting food for the food pantry, delivering poinsettias to the sick and shut-in, and purchasing holiday care packages for the local nursing home!

We are not only preserving our traditions, but we are experiencing and expanding them in a new and safe way.

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