

## Social Media Challenge

Rethink Church has an awesome social media challenge for you to dive into something reflective and meaningful together this Advent season!

Advent is the season leading up to Christmas. It is 28 days of preparation. This year, you're invited to prepare by looking for the visual reminders of God's presence... daily.

The challenge is this: Our Advent Photo-a-Day Challenge. Each day during the season of Advent, Rethink Church

([facebook.com/umcrethinkchurch](https://facebook.com/umcrethinkchurch)) will post a word for reflection. Take a moment (or several moments) of pause and reflection, then share a response to that word through a picture posted on social media. Post your picture on social media with #RethinkChurch.

Don't worry if you miss a day or two--there's no failing this challenge. (And we know you don't need the extra pressure!) The purpose is simply to provide a gift of added meaning to this special season.



*Special Advent issue*

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*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:  
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 *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.*

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# Advent 2021

Advent begins four Sundays before Christmas and ends on Christmas Eve. During Advent, we prepare for, and anticipate, the coming of Christ. This year Advent begins on Nov. 28. Each Sunday represents a certain theme.



## What are the four Sundays of Advent?

If you've ever struggled to keep the four Sundays of Advent straight, you're not alone. For hundreds of years, faithful Christians have observed the four weeks leading up to Christmas Day as a special time to prepare their hearts, but these practices have changed over time and place.

The first mention of Advent is found in ancient writings dating back to the sixth century, with some anecdotal mentions as early as AD 380 at the Spanish Council of Saragossa! So not only is it an old Christian practice, but it's also a very personal one, as churches have adapted the practice to suit their local parishes.

So while there's no authoritative guide to Advent, we can find some commonalities in the ways

churches have practiced the observance of Advent throughout history.

Generally, the themes that correspond to each week fall into these categories:

**Week 1:**  
(Nov. 28, 2021): Hope (or promise)

**Week 2:**  
(Dec. 5, 2021): Preparation (or waiting or prophecy)

**Week 3:**  
(Dec. 12, 2021): Joy (or peace)

**Week 4:**  
(Dec. 19, 2021): Love (or adoration)

While the differences in weekly Advent themes may be confusing, we can unite in our desire to quiet our hearts during a hectic holiday season and worship Jesus.

## Advent books for all

There are some great books to help enrich your Advent season:



See page 3 for details.

### ***Twas the Season of Advent***

In *Twas the Season of Advent*, United Methodist and children's author Glenys Nellist uses poetry and prose to celebrate each day of Advent. Sharing stories from the Old and New Testament, the new book highlights the promise of Christ's birth, with portions written in the familiar rhyming scheme of *Twas the Night Before Christmas*. Though the storytelling is directed at children ages 4 to 8, the hardcover picture book is meant to engage the entire family.

### ***The Journey***

Celebrating 10 years since its original publication, *The Journey*, United Methodist pastor and author Adam Hamilton takes the reader on the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem in this anniversary edition.

Hamilton weaves together history, archaeological data, and a personal look at some of the stories surrounding Jesus Christ's birth to make the world-changing event more real. *The Journey* is available as a single book, in a DVD version and a four-week devotional along with study guides for adults, youth and children.

### ***All the Good: A Wesleyan Way of Christmas***

*All the Good: A Wesleyan Way of Christmas*, written by a group of diverse Wesleyan scholars, takes the reader on an Advent

journey guided by the practices in John Wesley's means of grace. Highlighted by illustrations and stories, chapters examine preparing the way for God, the impact and significance of prayer, the substance of good works and caring for others and sharing God's mission to the world.

*All the Good* is accompanied by a devotional and leader kit for group study.

### ***The Heart that Grew Three Sizes***

In this new Advent study, United Methodist pastor and author Matt Rawle looks at Christmas through the lens of Dr. Seuss' classic *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*.

Last year's "stolen" Christmas caused Matt and his congregation to rediscover what is essential in our celebrations of Jesus coming into the world. And how Dr. Seuss's familiar story pointed to lessons about love, grace, and a willingness to see who is not at our tables.

Readers, reflecting on how Christ speaks to us through our culture, will consider how the Grinch's heart grew three sizes on Christmas morning, as well as ponder that the very thing we hate may be the one thing that changes our lives.

*The Heart that Grew Three Sizes* is available in paperback and DVD and with leader guides for adult, children and youth, as well as worship resources.