

Welcome the Unexpected

25 Days of Hope, Joy, Peace, and God’s Future

DECEMBER 1–25 • 2026

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Richmond, Kentucky

Devoted • Empowered • Committed

About This Book

Welcome the Unexpected: 25 Days of Hope, Joy, Peace, and God’s Future

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Mission: make disciples who make a difference. Vision: Devoted, Empowered, Committed.

The reflections, prayers, and practices in this book are original devotional writing prepared for this congregation. Illustrative situations are invitations to reflection, rather than accounts of specific church events.

Scripture passages are listed for daily reading. Use your preferred Bible; the New Living Translation is a fitting companion. Scripture is discussed in paraphrase rather than reproduced as a quoted translation.

This 25-day journey runs December 1–25. In 2026, Advent begins November 29; the final reading celebrates Christmas Day. The five themes are devotional movements rather than the order of the traditional Advent candles.

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AI assistance was used for grammar and editing.

An Invitation to Begin

Advent invites us to make room for God. We arrive with cherished memories, unfinished questions, and hopes for the people we love. Christ meets us here and opens a future we cannot create by ourselves.

This book is an invitation for Richmond First to grow closer to Christ and one another. Our calling to be Devoted, Empowered, Committed becomes visible through prayer, presence, learning, generosity, service, and witness. Every generation has a gift to bring. Every person needs room to receive grace.

Each day, read the Scripture in your Bible, then spend a few quiet minutes with the reflection. Consider the question, choose the practice as your circumstances allow, and close with the prayer. Use the response lines for a word, a name, or a next step. A missed day does not put you behind in God’s love; simply begin again.

Read alone, with a friend, or around a household table. Children can participate by naming one thing they notice and helping choose an act of kindness. In a group, let people pass when they prefer to listen.

As we honor the faith that has shaped our church, may we remain ready for fresh gifts and new neighbors. May this journey help us receive the unexpected, practice hope, share joy, make peace, and walk together into God’s future.

This devotional is a compilation drawn from the 2026 sermons and the life of Richmond First United Methodist Church. As you read, remember the ways God has been at work among us, and let these reflections encourage you to follow Christ and welcome the unexpected.

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An Open Door

Read: Luke 1:26–38

Mary's ordinary day becomes the beginning of an extraordinary story. The angel brings a promise she could never have planned: she will bear Jesus. Mary asks a real question before offering her trust. Her willingness makes room for God without requiring her to understand everything first.

December often arrives with expectations already packed into it. We know which traditions we treasure, which responsibilities await us, and how we hope Christmas will feel. Yet God may meet us through a conversation, an interruption, or a person we did not expect.

At Richmond First, welcoming the unexpected begins with an open heart. Someone unfamiliar may carry a gift our congregation needs. A child's question may invite deeper faith. A changed plan may create space to listen. God's grace is already at work before we notice it; our invitation is to respond.

Begin this journey with a simple willingness: Lord, I am here. We do not have to force a remarkable experience. We can offer God the ordinary day in front of us.

REFLECT

What expectation could keep me from noticing God today?

PRACTICE

Pause before your first task. Open your hands and offer God your day.

PRAY

God of surprising grace, help me receive this day with attention and trust. Make room in me for your presence and for the people you send. Amen.

Grace Arrives First

Read: Luke 1:5–17

Before Elizabeth and Zechariah can announce good news, God is already preparing it. Their years of waiting have not placed them outside God's attention. The coming birth of John belongs to a larger story they are only beginning to see.

Our Wesleyan tradition gives us a beautiful name for grace that goes before us: prevenient grace. God reaches toward us before we know how to reach back. Faith begins in God's love, and our response grows from that gift.

Think of someone who first helped you feel welcome at Richmond First. Perhaps it was a person who learned your name, made room beside them, or remembered a burden you were carrying. Such gestures can help us recognize a love that was seeking us all along.

This season, we can become people through whom that welcome reaches others. A new neighbor, a college student, or a person returning after a long absence may need a gentle invitation. We need not know the whole story to offer kindness. Grace has already arrived before us.

REFLECT

Who helped me recognize that God's love included me?

PRACTICE

Thank someone who welcomed you, and extend one small welcome to another person.

PRAY

Gracious God, thank you for loving us first. Let my words and actions help someone discover the welcome you have already prepared. Amen.

Questions in the Sanctuary

Read: Luke 1:18–25

Zechariah receives a promise while serving in a sacred place, and he struggles to believe it. Familiar surroundings do not make faith effortless. Even a person who has spent years praying can wonder whether hope is still possible.

Perhaps church has been part of your life for decades. Perhaps you are beginning again. Either way, you may bring questions into worship: Will this grief ever soften? Can our family heal? What comes next for our church? God's presence can hold those questions.

Zechariah's silence becomes part of his waiting. Our own quiet can give us room to hear what hurry has covered. We do not need to fill every moment with explanations or every prayer with polished language.

Richmond First's call to deepen discipleship includes learning to listen together. A congregation grows when people can bring honest questions and find patient companions. Today, allow yourself to be present before God without resolving everything. The One who hears your prayer also knows the words you cannot yet speak.

REFLECT

What honest question am I carrying into this season?

PRACTICE

Sit quietly for two minutes. Tell God your question without trying to answer it.

PRAY

Patient God, meet me in what I understand and what I cannot explain. Teach our church to listen with humility and to make space for honest faith. Amen.

Make Room for a Different Story

Read: Matthew 1:18–24

Joseph must decide how to respond when the future he imagined changes. Matthew describes him as righteous, and his first intention already shows concern for Mary's dignity. Then God's message invites him into a calling he could never have invented.

We often meet people after forming a quick opinion about their lives. We see an absence, a mistake, an unfamiliar face, or a difficult circumstance. Joseph's story asks us to slow down. There may be more happening than we can see.

A welcoming church learns to protect dignity before demanding an explanation. Someone walking through Richmond First's doors may be carrying divorce, loneliness, questions about faith, or a season of recovery. They deserve to be met as a person loved by God.

Welcoming the unexpected involves allowing another person's story to interrupt our assumptions. We can listen carefully, speak gently, and leave room for grace. Joseph takes a faithful step by receiving Mary into his life. Today, our faithful step may be making room for someone whose journey differs from ours.

REFLECT

Whose story have I judged before listening?

PRACTICE

In one conversation today, ask a thoughtful question and listen without interrupting.

PRAY

Merciful God, loosen my assumptions. Give me Joseph's courage to respond with dignity, compassion, and trust when another person's story surprises me. Amen.

God in the Ordinary

Read: Luke 1:39–45

Mary goes to Elizabeth, and God's extraordinary promise is held within an ordinary visit. There is a greeting, a welcome, and the joy of being recognized. Elizabeth helps Mary see that she does not have to carry her calling alone.

Much of a church's life happens in moments that never appear in a report. Someone stays after worship to listen. Someone prepares a room. Someone remembers a name or delivers a meal. God can use such ordinary faithfulness to make love tangible.

At Richmond First, being Devoted, Empowered, Committed takes shape through these small acts. Devotion becomes attention to God. The Spirit empowers a loving response. Commitment becomes showing up for another person.

Consider where God has placed you today: at home, at work, in a classroom, in a waiting room, or beside someone who needs company. You may not have an impressive gift to offer. Your presence may be the gift. Like Elizabeth, you can help another person feel seen and strengthened for the road ahead.

REFLECT

Where might my ordinary presence become a blessing?

PRACTICE

Offer someone ten unhurried minutes of attention.

PRAY

God who meets us in everyday life, make me attentive to simple opportunities to love. Let my presence bring encouragement to someone who feels alone. Amen.

Hope Has Deep Roots

Read: Isaiah 11:1–9

Isaiah pictures new life growing from a stump. What looks finished becomes the place where a shoot appears. The prophet's vision reaches toward a ruler shaped by God's Spirit and a creation transformed by justice and peace.

A stump does not look promising. We may see something similar in our own lives: a relationship strained by years of disappointment, a dream set aside, or energy that feels spent. Scripture invites us to look again without pretending that loss was easy.

Richmond First is preparing to honor a century of life in its church building. Memories can remind us that others prayed, gave, taught, and served so that we could receive faith. Their legacy can nourish a living future. Gratitude for those roots invites us to cultivate the growth God is bringing now.

Hope may begin quietly: a child discovering prayer, a new friendship, a fresh willingness to serve. We cannot command the growth. We can tend the ground, remain attentive, and trust the God whose life reaches deeper than we can see.

REFLECT

Where have I assumed that growth is no longer possible?

PRACTICE

Write one gratitude for the church's past and one prayer for its future.

PRAY

God of deep roots and new beginnings, nourish our hope. Help us honor faithful lives by tending the new life you are bringing among us. Amen.

Hope While We Wait

Read: Psalm 130

The psalmist cries from the depths and waits for the Lord. This prayer holds both need and trust. Waiting does not erase the ache; it places the ache before the God whose love endures.

December can make waiting feel especially lonely. Other people seem to have good news while we await a test result, a job, a reconciliation, or relief from grief. The bright decorations may make our private darkness more noticeable.

You do not have to manufacture a cheerful feeling to belong in this devotional or in our church. Your honest prayer is welcome. A community of faith can carry hope with you when you have little strength to carry it yourself.

Today, imagine the congregation praying alongside those who wait. Some needs are known; many are hidden. Our calling to care for one another begins with remembering that every pew may hold an unfinished story. Hope grows as we offer presence, practical help, and prayers that make room for tears. God's steadfast love meets us in the depths as well as in celebration.

REFLECT

What waiting do I need to bring honestly before God?

PRACTICE

Contact someone in a difficult season. Offer companionship without promising a quick solution.

PRAY

Faithful God, hold those who wait today. Give us enough hope for this day and teach us to accompany one another with patient love. Amen.

A Light for the Next Step

Read: Isaiah 9:2–7

Isaiah speaks of light shining upon people who have walked in darkness. The promised child carries a vision of justice, peace, and a kingdom sustained by God's zeal. Hope rests in God's faithful action.

When we want the whole road illuminated, even a small step can feel inadequate. Yet many faithful journeys begin with enough light to move forward. We make a call. We ask for help. We return to prayer. We offer ourselves for a task we have been avoiding.

Our church's mission to make disciples who make a difference grows through people willing to take those steps. Someone learns to teach. Someone invites a neighbor. Someone chooses to begin learning Scripture with others. The future takes shape through present faithfulness.

Ask God for light on the step that belongs to you today. You need not carry every responsibility or solve every problem. Christ meets us as people learning to follow. The Spirit empowers us to respond, and the community helps us keep walking when courage grows thin.

REFLECT

What next step is becoming clear, even though the whole road is not?

PRACTICE

Take one manageable step toward something you have been praying about.

PRAY

God of light, guide my feet today. Give me courage to follow what you have shown me and patience with what remains unknown. Amen.

Hope at the Kitchen Table

Read: Ruth 1:16–18; 4:13–17

Ruth's loyalty begins amid bereavement and uncertainty. She stays with Naomi without knowing how their story will unfold. By the end of the book, their family has become part of a future larger than either woman could see.

We have walked through Ruth's story together at Richmond First: loyalty, compassion, obedience, and blessing. Advent invites us to remember that God still works through ordinary relationships. A loving decision today may nourish a future we will never fully witness.

Picture a kitchen table where someone listens, a ride offered to a person who cannot drive, or a meal shared when a family is weary. These are everyday places where hope receives hands and feet. They do not make every difficulty disappear. They keep someone from facing difficulty alone.

Ruth's place in the family line leading to Jesus reminds us that God's redemption embraces unexpected people. Our neighbors' stories belong in our prayers and in our shared life. Today, let loyalty become a practical expression of hope for someone God has placed near you.

REFLECT

Who needs my steady presence more than my advice?

PRACTICE

Offer a practical act of care: a meal, a ride, a visit, or help with a task.

PRAY

Redeeming God, work through our ordinary relationships. Give us Ruth's loyalty and compassion so that others may glimpse a hopeful future through our care. Amen.

Hope for the Children Among Us

Read: Mark 10:13–16

People bring children to Jesus, and the disciples try to turn them away. Jesus responds by welcoming the children and blessing them. Those regarded as an interruption are received with tenderness and attention.

A congregation's future includes the children who are already among us and those whose families have yet to find a church home. They need adults who listen, learn their names, answer questions with patience, and show them how faith is lived.

At Richmond First, our concern for children, youth, and families becomes meaningful through such relationships. A child's presence can help us notice God with fresh eyes. Their questions can stretch our understanding. Their gifts belong in the life of the church today.

We plant hope when we make room for a young person's voice and provide a trustworthy community around them. We also encourage parents and caregivers, who may arrive tired or unsure. Jesus' welcome invites us to receive the whole family with kindness. The love we offer today can become a memory of grace that lasts for years.

REFLECT

How can I help a child or young person know they belong?

PRACTICE

Encourage a parent, caregiver, teacher, or youth leader with a specific word of thanks.

PRAY

Welcoming Jesus, bless our children and families. Shape us into a church where young people are safe, heard, loved, and invited to grow in faith. Amen.

Joy That Tells the Truth

Read: Luke 1:46–55

Mary's song celebrates what God is doing. She sings of mercy, the lifting of the lowly, and hungry people receiving good things. Her joy has room for the world's wounds because she trusts God's transforming love.

Sometimes we treat joy as an obligation to seem happy. That can be exhausting, especially when the season holds grief, financial pressure, or family strain. Mary offers a deeper invitation: notice God's mercy and join the movement of that mercy toward others.

Joy may arise in a meal shared, a prayer answered through someone's generosity, or the relief of being welcomed without embarrassment. We can make space for these gifts while remaining honest about what is hard.

At Richmond First, joyful faith can become compassionate action. We celebrate God's goodness and allow that goodness to shape our concern for our neighbors. Mary's song asks us to look toward those whose needs are easily overlooked. The joy of Advent grows as God's love is received and shared, reaching into the places where hope is most needed.

REFLECT

Where have I noticed mercy in the middle of something difficult?

PRACTICE

Name one gift of mercy, then offer a kindness that meets a real need.

PRAY

God of mercy, give us joy with open eyes and generous hands. Help us celebrate your goodness while responding to the hunger and hurt around us. Amen.

The Joy of Being Recognized

Read: Luke 1:39–45

Elizabeth receives Mary with a blessing. Before Mary must explain herself, Elizabeth recognizes God's work in her life. Their meeting becomes a moment of shared joy and reassurance.

Being recognized can change a day. Someone remembers our name, notices our effort, or asks how we truly are. We discover that we have a place in another person's attention. Such recognition can be especially meaningful for someone who has felt invisible.

Our congregation hopes to be a place where people feel loved and accepted and can find Jesus. That vision becomes real through the way we meet one another. A greeting can open a door; an ongoing relationship helps a person know the welcome will last.

Think of those who might be overlooked: someone seated alone, a quiet volunteer, a student far from home, or a neighbor whose first language differs from yours. Joy can grow when we move toward them with respect and interest. Like Elizabeth, we can speak encouragement that helps another person recognize the grace present in their life.

REFLECT

Who might need to be seen and encouraged today?

PRACTICE

Learn someone's name or thank a person whose quiet work often goes unnoticed.

PRAY

God who knows us by name, teach me to recognize the people around me. Let my attention become a small sign of your joy and care. Amen.

Joy Across Generations

Read: Luke 1:57–66

When Elizabeth gives birth, neighbors and relatives share her joy. A child's arrival draws a community into wonder. People begin asking what this child's life will become, sensing that God is at work.

Every generation carries gifts that another generation needs. Older adults hold stories of endurance, wisdom, and faithful service. Young adults offer questions and possibilities. Children bring curiosity and delight. A church grows richer when these gifts are received together.

Richmond First's future will be strengthened by relationships that cross age groups. Such relationships need more than shared space. They grow through conversation, prayer, learning, and service side by side.

Imagine the joy of a young person hearing how someone learned to trust God through difficulty. Imagine an older adult discovering a new possibility through a younger person's idea. Neither needs to have all the answers. Each can become a companion in faith. Advent gathers us around God's surprising work, inviting every generation to receive and share the good news. There is a place for each of us in that circle.

REFLECT

What could I learn from someone in a different generation?

PRACTICE

Ask someone older or younger than you what gives them hope this Christmas.

PRAY

God of every generation, draw us closer to one another. Help us share wisdom, receive fresh insight, and rejoice in the gifts you place among us. Amen.

Joy with an Empty Chair

Read: Psalm 126

Psalm 126 remembers laughter and asks God to restore the people again. It holds remembered joy alongside present tears. The prayer gives us language for seasons when gratitude and sorrow share the same room.

At Christmas, an empty chair can speak loudly. We may miss someone who has died, someone living far away, or a relationship that has changed. Familiar songs and traditions may bring both comfort and ache.

You are allowed to carry both. Love makes memories precious, and grief does not cancel your place in God's care. You do not need to explain your tears or measure your faith by how festive you feel.

As a congregation, we can make room for tender hearts. We can remember names, invite conversation, and offer company without rushing someone toward happiness. Joy may arrive softly: a story told with affection, a candle lit, a moment of gratitude for love that still shapes us. The God who receives our tears is present in these quiet gifts. Today, let remembrance become a prayer held in grace.

REFLECT

What memory would I like to hold gently before God?

PRACTICE

Remember someone with a story, a prayer, or a quiet moment of gratitude.

PRAY

Compassionate God, be near to those who grieve. Hold our memories with tenderness and give us companions who can share both our tears and our joy. Amen.

Joy Becomes Generosity

Read: 2 Corinthians 9:6–8

Paul encourages generosity that grows from the heart. God's grace provides a foundation for giving, and the community's gifts become practical care for others. Joy finds expression as love is shared.

December can become crowded with pressure to purchase more. Christian generosity invites thoughtful attention to what another person truly needs. Sometimes money makes a difference. Sometimes time, presence, encouragement, or a skill becomes the needed gift.

At Richmond First, stewardship embraces all that God has entrusted to us. Our prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness belong to the life of discipleship. A willing heart can ask where these gifts might support children, encourage families, welcome neighbors, or deepen our care for one another.

Generosity also includes knowing our limits. A small gift offered freely is meaningful. Receiving help with gratitude is part of shared life too. Today, consider a gift that fits your circumstances and answers a real need. Let it become an expression of the grace you have received, offered with joy and without seeking recognition.

REFLECT

What can I share freely and thoughtfully today?

PRACTICE

Choose one gift of time, money, skill, or encouragement and offer it quietly.

PRAY

Generous God, thank you for the gifts entrusted to me. Shape my giving with wisdom, freedom, and joy so that another person may experience your care. Amen.

Peace Begins with Presence

Read: John 14:25–27

Jesus speaks of peace while preparing his disciples for separation and uncertainty. He promises the Holy Spirit, who will teach and remind them. His gift of peace is rooted in an enduring relationship with God.

We often wait for circumstances to settle before allowing ourselves to rest. The calendar remains full, the questions remain open, and peace seems postponed. Jesus meets people within unsettled circumstances and offers his presence there.

Take a moment to notice what you are carrying. Name the feeling without judging it. Breathe slowly and turn your attention toward Christ. This small pause can help you receive the day with greater clarity and kindness. Prayer gives us a place to bring what we cannot control.

A peaceful congregation is formed by people learning to return to God's presence. We can enter a conversation, a meeting, or a family gathering with a little more patience when we remember that we are held in grace. The Spirit helps us respond thoughtfully and remain open to love.

REFLECT

What burden needs to be placed in Christ's care today?

PRACTICE

Pause for three slow breaths before a demanding conversation. Pray for a patient response.

PRAY

Jesus, meet me in the unsettled places of this day. Remind me of your presence and teach me to receive and share your peace. Amen.

Peace in Our Words

Read: James 1:19–20

James calls believers to listen readily and speak with care. These simple instructions become demanding when we feel misunderstood, hurried, or afraid. A moment of patience can change the direction of a conversation.

During the holidays, people with different expectations share tables and schedules. Old tensions can surface quickly. We may find ourselves defending a position before understanding what someone else is trying to say.

A faithful response begins with awareness. What am I feeling? What story am I assuming? What does this person need me to hear? Such questions create room for the Holy Spirit to shape our words.

At Richmond First, being committed to one another includes practicing respectful conversation. We can disagree and still protect another person's dignity. We can ask for clarification, own a careless remark, or take a pause when emotions run high. Peace grows through these choices. Today, offer your speech to God as part of your discipleship. A gentle and honest sentence may become a gift someone remembers long after Christmas.

REFLECT

When do I find listening most difficult?

PRACTICE

In one tense moment, pause and ask, “Can you help me understand?”

PRAY

God of wisdom, slow my reactions and deepen my listening. Give me truthful, gracious words that strengthen relationships and make room for understanding. Amen.

The Work of Making Peace

Read: Matthew 5:1–12

Jesus blesses peacemakers. The word invites action: people participating in the healing of relationships and communities. Making peace requires courage, truthfulness, and care for those who have been harmed.

It can begin with a sincere apology. It may involve addressing an unfair practice, helping people hear one another, or seeking wise support for a difficult situation. Peace grows where dignity is protected and love is joined to responsibility.

Some relationships cannot safely be restored through a private conversation. Faithful peacemaking may require boundaries, time, and help from trusted people. We can pray for another person while honoring the limits necessary for well-being.

For our congregation, this blessing reaches beyond our building into Richmond. Our witness includes the way we treat neighbors, respond to conflict, and stand beside people who need care. Today, ask where you can contribute to a more just and compassionate relationship. Choose a step that is honest, appropriate, and possible. God's Spirit can work through even a small beginning toward peace.

REFLECT

What would a truthful and caring step toward peace look like?

PRACTICE

Offer an apology, seek wise counsel, or support someone working to heal a conflict.

PRAY

Prince of Peace, make us courageous and compassionate. Guide us toward truth, protect those who are vulnerable, and teach us how to participate in your healing work. Amen.

Peace at a Wider Table

Read: Ephesians 2:13–22

Paul describes Christ bringing people near and forming a new household. Dividing hostility loses its authority before the reconciling work of Jesus. Those once regarded as outsiders receive a place among God's people.

At Richmond First, we have reflected on the communion table as a sign of our shared life in Christ. We come with different histories, languages, ages, and needs. Grace gathers us, and our common life calls us to welcome others.

A wider table begins with practical attention. Can a newcomer understand what is happening? Does someone have a place to sit? Have we made space for a voice we rarely hear? Hospitality grows through the willingness to notice and respond.

Welcoming others may also change us. A new friendship can deepen our understanding of God's love. Someone else's experience can reveal a need we have missed. Today, let Christ's reconciling grace stretch your circle of concern. The church becomes a living sign of peace as people discover they have a place in the household and a gift to share.

REFLECT

Whose presence could widen my understanding of God's family?

PRACTICE

Invite someone into a conversation, a meal, or a shared activity without pressure.

PRAY

Reconciling Christ, make our welcome generous and attentive. Help us receive one another as members of your household and share your peace across our differences. Amen.

Peace for a Weary Heart

Read: Matthew 11:28–30

Jesus invites weary people to come to him and learn from him. His gentleness makes room for people whose strength is running low. Discipleship includes receiving care as we learn to offer it.

By this point in December, many people are tired. Caregivers keep showing up. Volunteers complete unseen tasks. Parents manage responsibilities that continue after everyone else has gone to bed. Those who live alone may be weary from carrying everything themselves.

God does not measure your worth by how much you accomplish today. You are loved before the checklist is finished. A moment of rest can help you receive that truth with your whole self.

Our church's commitment to care includes making it easier for others to rest. We can share a task, release an unnecessary expectation, or offer help in a specific way. We can also accept help when it is offered. Today, listen for Jesus' gentle invitation. Lay down one burden you do not have to carry alone, and let grace become something you receive.

REFLECT

Where do I need rest or help?

PRACTICE

Set aside one unnecessary task, or ask someone for a specific kind of support.

PRAY

Gentle Jesus, receive my weariness. Teach me to rest in your love, accept care, and help make room for another person's rest. Amen.

A Future Larger Than Our Plans

Read: Luke 1:67–79

Zechariah's song looks back at God's promises and forward toward mercy, forgiveness, and the way of peace. His son's life belongs to a calling larger than the family's original hopes. God's future opens before them.

Our plans help us use time and resources wisely, yet they cannot contain everything God may do. A congregation can prepare faithfully while remaining teachable. We can ask what needs attention now and whose gifts might help us respond.

At Richmond First, reaching new people, deepening discipleship, developing leaders, and caring for our neighbors are ways of preparing for a living future. These hopes take shape through relationships and choices made today. We pray, listen, learn, and serve together.

Think about the part of the church's future you can nurture. Perhaps you can encourage a new volunteer, pray regularly for young adults, or join a group that helps you grow. God's future invites participation from ordinary people. You do not need to see the whole picture to offer a faithful contribution. Mercy can guide the next step.

REFLECT

What part of our shared future can I help nurture?

PRACTICE

Choose one way to strengthen the church's life beyond this Christmas season.

PRAY

God of unfolding promise, guide our church with mercy and wisdom. Make us teachable, courageous, and ready to contribute to the future you are opening. Amen.

Carry the Story Forward

Read: Psalm 78:1–7

The psalm calls God's people to tell the coming generation about God's faithfulness. Memory becomes a responsibility: receive the story, live within it, and pass it on so that others may place their hope in God.

As Richmond First prepares to celebrate a hundred years in its building, we have much to remember. A building holds memories of worship, learning, service, tears, and celebration. The deepest gift within those memories is the faithfulness of God experienced through people.

Consider a story you could share. Who helped you pray? Who offered care during a difficult season? When did you discover that you belonged? A simple, truthful memory can become an invitation for someone else to trust God.

Carrying the story forward also means leaving room for new stories. Those who come after us will encounter Christ in ways we cannot predict. We can offer them a living church shaped by generosity, welcome, and courage. Today, remember with gratitude and ask how your own faithfulness might become part of another person's beginning.

REFLECT

What story of God's care do I want another generation to hear?

PRACTICE

Write a short memory of faith and share it with someone who may be encouraged.

PRAY

Faithful God, thank you for those who carried your story to us. Help us share it with humility and live in ways that open hopeful beginnings for others. Amen.

Love Makes Room

Read: Luke 2:1–7

Luke tells of a journey, a birth, and a baby laid in a manger because there was no room available in the guest lodging. God's promised Savior enters the world amid ordinary pressures and limited space.

As Christmas approaches, we may recognize our own crowded lives. Time, energy, and attention have limits. Making room for Christ can begin with noticing where love is asking for our attention within those limits.

Someone may need a call more than another gift. A family may need a calm evening more than a perfect celebration. A neighbor may need practical help. Our hearts make room when we allow a person's dignity and need to matter in our decisions.

At Richmond First, making disciples who make a difference means learning to respond to Jesus in daily life. Love gives our devotion a practical shape. Today, let one act of hospitality prepare your heart for Christmas. It can be small and sincere. In the manger, God comes close enough to be received by ordinary hands. We are invited to make room.

REFLECT

Where is love asking for a little more space in my day?

PRACTICE

Release one optional demand and use that time for a caring act.

PRAY

God who comes close, open space in my heart and schedule. Help me receive Christ through attentive love for the people before me. Amen.

Good News for Ordinary People

Read: Luke 2:8–20

The shepherds are working when the announcement comes. God's glory enters their night, and they hear good news that leads them to a child. They go, see, and return to daily life with praise.

On Christmas Eve, some people gather for worship while others work, provide care, travel, or spend the evening alone. The shepherds remind us that God's good news reaches beyond the places where we expect a celebration to happen.

Wherever you are tonight, Christ's coming includes you. Bring the joy you feel and the burdens you carry. You do not have to create a perfect Christmas to receive the love of God.

As a church, we can help that love travel. Remember people who cannot gather with us. Pray for those working through the night, caring for a loved one, or missing familiar company. Offer a message or call when appropriate. The shepherds share what they have received; we can do the same with gentle words and faithful presence. The good news has entered our ordinary world, and its invitation remains open.

REFLECT

Who might need to hear that they are remembered tonight?

PRACTICE

Reach out to someone who may be working, grieving, or spending Christmas Eve alone.

PRAY

God of good news, meet us wherever this night finds us. Bring comfort to lonely hearts and send us to share the love we have received. Amen.

The Future Has Come Near

Read: John 1:1–14

John announces that the Word becomes flesh and dwells among us. In Jesus, God's life and light enter our human world. Christmas reveals the astonishing closeness of divine love.

We began this journey by opening ourselves to the unexpected. We practiced hope in waiting, joy with honest hearts, and peace through presence and action. Now we receive the gift toward which those practices point: Jesus Christ, who comes to make his home among us.

God's future takes on a face in Jesus. His life will reveal mercy, welcome, forgiveness, and self-giving love. As we follow him, that love shapes our lives and reaches through us to our neighbors.

Richmond First, may we enter the days ahead Devoted, Empowered, Committed: devoted in prayer and learning, empowered by the Spirit to serve, and committed to loving people. The mission continues after the decorations are packed away. Today, receive Christ's love and let it become a beginning. There are people to welcome, children to encourage, wounds to tend, and hopeful steps to take together. God has come near. We have a place in this story.

REFLECT

How will I carry Christ's love into the coming year?

PRACTICE

Name one practice from these 25 days that you will continue. Invite someone to practice it with you.

PRAY

Jesus Christ, dwell among us and within us. Form Richmond First in your love and send us to make disciples who make a difference. Amen.

A Blessing for the Journey

God of unexpected grace, thank you for meeting us in the life we actually live. Thank you for hope that takes root, joy that makes room for tears, and peace that teaches us to love with courage.

Bless Richmond First and every person whose life touches this congregation. Draw us closer to Jesus and closer to one another. Give children room to grow, young adults companions for the journey, families practical care, and older adults opportunities to share their gifts.

Help us honor the prayers and service of those who came before us. Keep our gratitude alive through generous welcome and faithful action today. Empower us by your Spirit to listen, learn, serve, and bear witness.

Send us into Richmond and beyond with open hearts. Help us make disciples who make a difference. Keep us Devoted, Empowered, Committed as we walk together into your future. Amen.

Continue Together

Choose one daily practice to carry into the new year. Share it with a friend, pray for one another, and check in each week. Let a small commitment grow into a shared habit of discipleship.

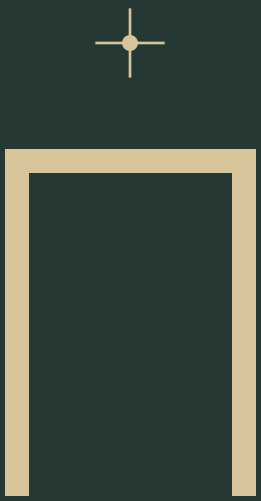
My Next Faithful Step

A gift of grace I want to remember:

A person I will pray for and encourage:

A practice I will continue:

A way I will contribute to our church’s future:



God has come near. We have a place in this story.

Receive the unexpected. Practice hope. Share joy. Make peace. Walk together into God’s future.

Richmond First United Methodist Church

Richmond, Kentucky

Devoted • Empowered • Committed