

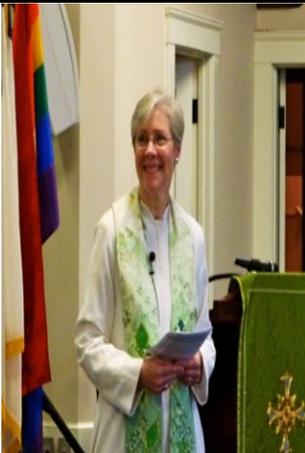


United Congregational Church



VOICES Newsletter

April 2017



Message from the Pastor

*Joy dawned again on Easter Day,
the sun shone out with bright array;
for when the Apostles hid in fear,
the Risen Christ to them appeared.*

*O Jesus, Savior, Gentle One,
come take our hearts to be your own,
that we may give you all our days
the willing tribute of our praise.*

Friends!

With our sisters and brothers around the world, we proclaim with joyous hearts:

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

We traveled together the journey of Holy Week: beginning with our Palm Sunday service – joyous with song (and tambourines!) and waving palms, and somber with the procession of the cross....On Maundy Thursday, we gathered around the table as Jesus gathered with his friends on his last supper with them, breaking bread together in a candlelit service....On Good Friday, we gathered at the foot of the cross, remembering the hours Jesus hung on the cross....

....the services of Holy Week prepared us for the joy of Easter – flowers, music, joyous alleluias as we celebrated Christ's resurrection and God's power of life over death, love over hate.

The Easter season ~ the 50 days between Easter Sunday and Pentecost ~ are a season of new life and hope...and so it seems fitting that on April 23, several of us will be gathering with members of other churches in the MACUCC to take part in a "celebration honoring vital churches". The Church Development Council of the MACUCC has invited United to share with other churches what we think makes us "vibrant" and "vital". On Palm Sunday, people at church were asked to write down your thoughts about what makes United vibrant and successful; your responses were collated and will be presented (in a fun and engaging

manner!) at the gathering.

Eight themes emerged from your responses: our diversity, our welcoming and accepting spirit, our engaging worship, our adaptability, our genuineness (our commitment to live our faith), our pastors (past and present), and our size (“A vibrant, successful church does not have to be a large membership church”).

Again and again, you lifted up your experience of the importance of the community you experience here – in the way people feel welcomed here who have not been welcomed in other churches, in the willingness and support in taking risks together, in how important it is to have a place to bring your faith into action for the larger community.

If you were at United six or more years ago, you remember the process you went through in deciding to “gift” our building and endowment to the Worcester Area Mission Society...talk about a leap of faith! At the time, there were no guarantees for what might happen to the church. Many options were considered: closing the church, merging with another church, renting space somewhere, worshipping in the downstairs chapel; several people expected that within a couple of years, United could close their doors....

...and now, we are being asked to be part of a conversation with other “vital” churches, and to share our experiences with the larger church!

Alleluia!

I am sure we will continue our “Easter conversations” long after the Easter season has ended ~ and pray we will continue to embody the new life and hope of Easter.

Blessings,
Nancy



Many thanks...

...to all who helped with our Holy Week and Easter services ~ musicians, liturgists, Gretchen Switzer (Maundy Thursday preacher), “setters up and takers down”, those who donated Easter flowers and those who delivered them to our less mobile members, and especially to Ed Bourgault, for all his extra work preparing space for our worship!



May 21st: Jazz Worship Service at United!!

On May 21st, we are delighted to have a special jazz service for our morning worship, featuring Willie Sordillo on the saxophone, Zoe Krohne as vocalist and Marlene del Rosario as pianist. Willie is well known in the MACUCC and New England as a superb musician and worship leader, and works often with Zoe and Marlene; Willie will be leading the music for the MACUCC, CT, and RI Annual Meeting in June and leads a jazz worship service every Thursday evening at Old South Church in Boston.

This is a **wonderful** opportunity to experience worship in a new and vibrant way ~ please invite your friends, family, and neighbors to join us that morning!

PLANNING AHEAD....

...so I'm guessing many of you have made – or are starting to make – plans for the summer ~ perhaps a vacation or day trips to favorite places.....if you have children or grandchildren, they might have already told you what they want to be for Halloween...you might have started talking with family about where to have Thanksgiving dinner this year....and some of you might already be picking up Christmas gifts when you happen to spot *just* the right gift for someone on your list...

And so ~ because it is **never** too late to plan ~ here's a date to plan for now and to put on your fall calendar: **Saturday October 28th will be our day-long-all-church-retreat!** Instead of a weekend retreat this year, we decided to gather for a Saturday – easier for many people to get away for one day rather than a weekend. Plans are still under way (obviously!! There are limits to how much we can plan ahead!) but we have the date, and we have the location: St Francis Episcopal Church in Holden. Please plan to join us!



CONGRATULATIONS!!

We offer our congratulations and blessings to our recent graduates:

Megan Farrar who has earned her M.Ed in Special Ed from Simmons College.

Jessica Wedell who has earned her B.S. in Mechanical Engineering with a concentration in ThermoFluids and minors in Aerospace Engineering and History.



IN MEMORIAM

We offer our prayers for the family of **Guy Metcalf**, a long time and faithful member of United. Guy's death on March 24 was a loss to all who knew him. We give thanks for the gift of his life and his years of service to United, and find comfort in knowing he is now joined with his beloved wife, Jo, in God's eternal peace.



EASTER FLOWERS

Easter Plants have been given to the Glory of God and in Memory /Honor of by the Following:

IN MEMORY OF:

*Bott & Kreiger parents
My loving wife, Marilyn
Joan Cushman
Vincent A. Droser, Jr. D.A. Droser
Vincent A. Droser, III
Jim Russell
Judith Quinn & Warren Page
Hennig & Beaudry Loved Ones
G. Everett Holmes
Ellen Longvall
Vin & Moo Peterson
Loved Ones
Josephine F. & Guy D. Metcalf
John & Althea Orcutt
In Loving memory of Warren Page
Our Parents
Our grandparents:
Ann & Nicholas Iannone, Marguerite
& Walter Rokosky, Florinda Villarreal
Dorothy Bell Jones/Robert W. Jones
Robert Switzer*

BY:

*JoAn Bott & Elise Kreiger
Emerson Brooks
Walter Cushman

Megan Alara Farrar
Dorista & John Goldsberry
Joy Hennig
Norma Holmes
Sandra Johnson
Sandra Johnson
Pat & Peter Keck
Karen H. Lebel
Katherine Orcutt
Judy Page
Joanna & Chip Pickering
Ann Rokosky & Alisa Villarreal

Gretchen & David Switzer
Gretchen & David Switzer*

IN HONOR OF:

*Karen & Greg Wilfrid
5 Grandchildren*

BY:

*Nancy Elder-Wilfrid
Elisabeth & Darrell Hyder*



PLANT SWAP MAY 7TH

May 7th we will have our annual plant swap after church. Everybody is invited to bring plants to give and take. Even if you have nothing to bring you are still welcome to take.

Gardeners usually are in need for thinning or separating their plants and this is a great occasion to find new homes for the extras.

I find plastic bags work fine, my pots are often too small anyway, and this makes it easy for the digger. If you can, please label your goods, otherwise I can do it as you bring them in.

Some people live in apartments and will be glad to take some of your divided houseplants. These should be brought in pots.

~ Elisabeth Hyder
Community & Fellowship Ministry



Sunday May 21
Elm Park, Worcester
Event Begins at 2pm

JOIN NOW

HELP PREVENT HOMELESSNESS!

On May 21, 2017, United Congregational Church will participate once again in the Walk for the Homeless. This annual event raises money for local organizations trying to prevent homelessness in our communities, and also seeks to increase awareness of the difficulty experienced by many people in trying to keep a roof over their head. Central Massachusetts has one of the most expensive housing markets in the country, with rents for a 2 bedroom apartment in Worcester averaging well over \$1,000 a month. Stagnating wages for many, and numerous cuts in social services, have also increased the obstacles to finding decent, affordable shelter.

The organizations funded by the Walk have been working hard to reverse these trends. The Central MA Housing Alliance last year assisted over 9,000 households with various housing services, while the Donations Clearinghouse provided 968 homes with furniture. Friendly House provided shelter to 144 families while they looked for permanent residences, and the Hope for Housing program prevented yet more families from becoming homeless.

We hope all members of United will join this effort to solve the problem of homelessness. Volunteers are needed for the team from our church participating in the 3 mile long Walk, which begins in Worcester's Elm Park at 2:00 pm on Sunday, May 21st. People can also help by financially sponsoring a walker. Donations in any amount will be gratefully accepted, and checks should be made out to "Walk for the Homeless". There will be a sign-up/information table in Merriman Chapel every Sunday beginning May 7th. Anyone wanting more details can also contact United member Tim Camp anytime at 508- 798- 6997, or at timbcamp@aol.com. Meanwhile, we thank everyone who has supported the Walk for the Homeless so generously in the past, and look forward to your involvement again this year!

In Christian Friendship, United's Mission & Outreach Ministry



Worcester Islamic Center

Meet Your Muslim Neighbors' Day

Sunday May 7th, 2017



REFRESHMENTS PROVIDED

VISIT YOUR LOCAL MOSQUE

Date: Sunday May 7th, 2017

Time: 1:00 pm – 4:00 pm

Location: 248 East Mountain Street
Worcester, MA 01606

For questions, comments or concerns please contact:

Presidentofwic@gmail.com

YOUR VISIT INCLUDES:

- ❖ Mosque Tours
- ❖ Presentations on Islam
- ❖ Open Questions & Answers
- ❖ Diverse Booths Presentations
- ❖ Arabic Calligraphy
- ❖ Free Henna design and Face Painting
- ❖ Free refreshments



United Calendar

- April 24 Carty Cupboard Volunteer Monday/Wesley United Methodist Church
- April 26 Board of Ministry Meeting
- April 30 Guest Speaker ~ Asima Silva on "Being Muslim in America"
- May 7 Annual Plant Swap
- May 21 Special "Jazz Worship" with Willie Sordillo
- May 21 Walk for the Homeless / Elm Park, Worcester

Resources

- UCC Lectionary Information (<http://www.macucc.org/pages/detail/220>)
- United Congregational Church (<http://www.ucc-worcester.org>)
- UCC Mass Conference (<http://macucc.org/>)
- National UCC Web Page (<http://www.ucc.org/>)



Michigan congregation's 'Blessing Bags' bless others at Easter

March 30, 2017

Written by Connie Larkman

Count your blessings. That simple premise has carried a Lenten mission of a United Church of Christ congregation in Michigan for more than 50 years, and collected thousands of dollars for local charities. And this year, it's helping feed students in need.

It's a great little idea called Blessing Bags. Made with love by the women of First Congregational Church in New Baltimore, Mich., the bags are distributed to members of the congregation just before Lent begins. Families use them to collect coins and cash from Ash Wednesday to Easter. They are counting their blessings, so others can too.

"It is probably my favorite mission project as it makes us think about all the blessings we do have in our lives and they are so many," said Phyllis Maddix, coordinator of the First Congregational mission team. "I also think about all the wonderful people we have had on our church that are no longer with us. Many of them made the Blessing Bags, including my mom. I love that it is pretty unique to our congregation."

During Lent, church members drop money into the Blessing Bags every time they feel blessed. At Easter, they collect the bags and count the tangible evidence of their blessings, which is donated to a local charity.

"We select the recipient of the project for the year by a vote of the mission team members," said Maddix. "Anyone that wants can offer a suggestion. We usually do local charities, but have done others too, such as Habitat for Humanity, and the Heifer Project."

This year, the eight-member mission team will be sending the collection to the area's Feed the Bay Backpack Program. The program, run by volunteers and supported by the community, provides food on weekends to local students in need.

Many members of the New Baltimore church can't remember a time without the Blessing Bags. They have been involved in this project for more than 50 years, since the early 1960's. It started with little cards, which asked congregants to put a dime on the card every time they felt blessed. It changed to Blessing Bags not long after. The drawstring bags are handmade and reused, with a few more added to the collection annually.

"I have been a member of First Congregational Church since the 70's and have participated in the

annual Blessing Bags each year since then," said Peggy Sehlmeier, who is also a member of the missions team. "We have a wonderful, very generous congregation which supports all of our projects."

The church, which gathers 60-70 people in worship each week, counts a lot of blessings during Lent. They usually collect \$500-\$700 for their designated charity every year.

"As a new member of First Congregational this is my first time using the Blessing Bag," said Simone Campau. "When I receive what I think is some type of blessing it's great to share by filling my bag! I don't know who originally thought of this but I believe it would serve most of us to pay attention to our blessings large and small and recognize them by sharing them with others."

