



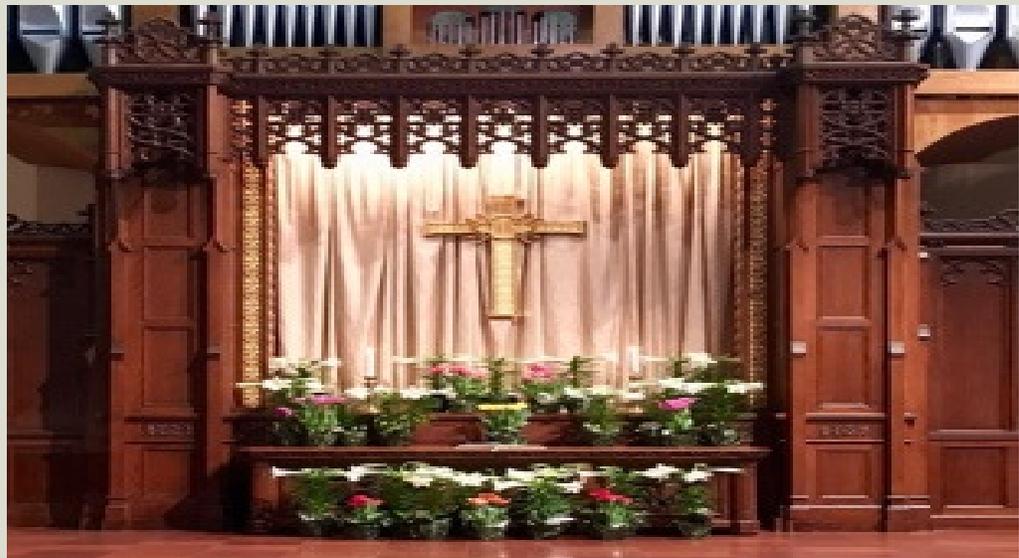
United Congregational Church



VOICES Newsletter

April 2020

Message from the Pastor



Dear friends,

It is a whole new world we are trying to make our way through these days...and it is hard to imagine how quickly our lives have changed and how dramatically different our world is from what it was even three weeks ago...

...and we are all trying to adapt, to stay connected and calm and wash our hands! Even while we are physically apart, we are deeply connected by our prayers for one another; many of us are on our United Google Group email chain, and so are in touch regularly through email; others are connecting by phone and even – the US Postal Service!

Several of our ministries have been meeting thanks to the technology of Zoom, so know that the work and ministry of our church has been continuing! Staff has continued to work as and when we can ~ and my apologies in advance for a perhaps more rushed issue of Voices than usual: I asked Karen, our office administrator late this afternoon if she would be able to send out an issue of Voices on short notice, so this is a “quick turn-

around” issue, but I wanted to get information to you about Easter and Holy Week as quickly as possible and this is the best way! We are, as I said, adapting and learning day by day ~ and figuring how we can worship together in these complicated times...and are grateful for the compassion and understanding and flexibility ~ and good humor and, of course, faithfulness ~ of our church!

Five of us met this morning at church ~ remaining always a socially responsible distance apart ~ and made plans for worship from Palm Sunday through Easter...a variety of different ways we hope everyone will be able to be part of in one way or another. We are planning a combination emailed worship services and “Zoom Worship”, which will allow anyone with internet access to connect with everyone else over the internet – see each other’s faces (in little boxes!) and talk together...we’re trying it with a prayer gathering before we try it for a worship service, but others have had great success with it ~ so we’re hopeful!

If you are not on the United Google Group email chain, and would like to be, please contact Karen in the church office (staff@ucc-worcester.org) and ask her to add your name to the list. If you are having problems, please let me or Karen know! The Google Group has been a wonderful way to stay in touch with one another quickly and easily, and last minute opportunities and prayer requests are regularly shared this way, and I urge you, if you are not already on our Google Group, to sign up!

Please do not hesitate to be in touch with me about any concerns you have during this unsettling time. Obviously, this was not how I expected my final Holy Week and Easter to be ~ much less the last weeks of my ministry, and it has been a deep sadness to me to be missing time with you that I had been anticipating. There have been many losses because of this pandemic ~ people have been separated from loved ones in times of illness, death and birth, missed weddings, graduations and so many other major milestones...it is hard to even begin to grasp the enormity of all that has been lost and can never be made up; the last months and weeks of my ministry are but a small part of this great loss, but a very big and heartbreaking one for me.

I have told the Board of Ministries that I will delay my retirement until we are able to be back together ~ in person ~ for several weeks...so I am grateful that we will have time together, if not as planned or expected, before I leave. Obviously, we don’t have a date or plans.....but we will keep you posted!

Always, I ask your prayers for one another, for those who are serving in medical professions and as care-givers, for police, fire-fighters and first responders, for delivery people and store clerks ~ for everyone who is working to keep us safe and healthy; for parents trying to manage work and children at home, for children cut off from friends and routines; for people confined to nursing homes and hospitals, especially isolated from loved ones....our list goes on and on...as do our prayers. And always, always, always, we

pray for all to be healthy and safe, and for an end to this virus.

Blessings, dear friends,
Nancy



EASTER FLOWERS!

A number of people have sent in checks to the church office for Easter flowers, giving them in memory or honor of loved ones. Because we will not be able to worship together on Easter morning, we are planning to fill the church with flowers on our first Sunday back, and will save flower donations to use then, with an insert listing those remembered with the flowers.



REMEMBER THE FABRIC

While the tapestry that is United is looking a little different right now, we are still a beautiful tightly woven radiantly colored fabric that we now see also has fibers of elastic as we stretch and change shape to create church in a different way.

Please remember as you celebrate church to also send your pledge checks to Peter Keck at his home. If you pledge weekly, sending a check for the month is best as fewer checks means fewer trips for stamps and fewer trips to the bank which is our goal. Those of you with online banking can have the check sent straight from the bank to the Keck's address. That is even better.

Thank you for all that you do to keep yourselves and others safe and to creatively bring our community together. Imagine what our tapestry will look like when we are next together!

Thinking of you all,

Your Stewardship Ministry

IN OUR PRAYERS...

We hold Karen Dorshimer-Chaplin in our prayers as she mourns the death of her husband, Bob Chaplin, on March 20th. Bob's death after a long illness was complicated by the many restrictions caused by COVID 19, and Karen was unable to be with Bob in his last days as they both longed to be. We pray for God's peace to surround and embrace Karen, and for her memories of their long life and love together be a comfort. A memorial and celebration of Bob's life will be at a future date.



HOPE IS BLOOMING AT UNITED

Over a month ago the children had painted planters and filled them with soil and seeds. The seedlings have sprouted and are continuing to grow! We are continue to see God's Light all around us and in the hope of new life blossoming.

- Spiritual Life and Diaconate Ministry

UPDATE FROM MISSION OUTREACH MINISTRY (MOM)

The current climate of social distancing has exacerbated the challenge of reaching out to the most vulnerable members of our community.

The Mission Outreach Ministry met (virtually) recently and concluded the most effective method to help with local homelessness, housing and hunger issues was by quickly lending financial assistance.

As a result we agreed to immediately provide funding to the Mustard Seed Soup Kitchen, the Central Mass Housing Alliance (CMHA), and the Interfaith Hospitality Network (IHN).

Our volunteer support to the John St. Soup Kitchen has been temporarily suspended, but we will continue to seek ways to offer assistance to this program and similar efforts that serve those in need.

The IHN shelter on June St. continues to operate with social distancing guidelines in place. Our next scheduled volunteer week with IHN is in August.

On another note, the One Great Hour of Sharing offering that was originally scheduled for March 22 will be rescheduled for when we are back in worship at Institute Rd.

Blessings, peace, and good health to all.

HOLY WEEK: REVISED!



PALM SUNDAY: APRIL 5TH

We have been emailing our Sunday services to everyone on the Google Group. If you have not been receiving them, and would like to, please let me know. Our Palm Sunday service will also be emailed to people the day before Palm Sunday; again, if you don't receive it and would like to, please let me know - even though it will most likely be after Palm Sunday!



MAUNDY THURSDAY IS APRIL 9TH

We are arrainging a Zoom Maundy Thursday service for 7:00 that evening; if you would like to join in via Zoom, an invitation will be sent around through the Google Group; if you don't receive an invitation via email, please let me know. I will send around an email copy of the service, with links to different people reading the Tenebrae readings so you can hear the readings. There will be two options then for Maundy Thursday: you can read through the worship service on your own, whenever you want, with links to United members reading the Tenebrae readings and links to the music for the service; you can Zoom in to a live service, led by several United members, Linda Michel and myself (you can follow along with the emailed service).



GOOD FRIDAY IS APRIL 10TH

This will be a service you can read through (with links to music) at a time of your choosing, again sent via Google Group.



EASTER MORNING, APRIL 12TH

We are making arrangements for a Zoom Easter service, which anyone who chooses can join at 10:30 that morning; if you would like to join, you can register when you get an invitation via email through our Google Group email list. I will also send around an email copy of the service, so that you can join in with the service live, or read through it when you choose. Again, please let me know if you aren't on Google and would like a copy of the service!

We haven't had a Lent or Holy Week quite like this before, and so are hoping that this combination of options will both allow us to experience something of the grace of this time, as well as connect us in new ways....and so I ask your patience as we try new things and do our best to "be church" together in spirit and heart while apart in body!

Please continue to stay in touch via email and phone, especially sending around requests for prayers and those ever more precious Light of God moments!

United Calendar & Prayer Intentions



CALENDAR:

APRIL PRAYER INTENTIONS:

We are a community of faith: praying for and with each other! Each week in our Sunday bulletin, we list several members of United for whom we pray during the coming week. We are including that list in Voices so that those who are unable to come to church will know who is being prayed for, and can join their prayers with ours.

For Sunday, Apr 5th: Alisa Villarreal, Elise Wanerka, Audrey White,, Sally Whitman.

For Sunday, Apr 12th: Rachel, Cleve & Thea Wiese, Althea, Becca, Xander & Zoe Williams.

For Sunday, Apr 19th: Ginny Woodbury, Dorothy Wright, Celsa Ayala-Coloma, Cesar & Ricardo Coloma.

For Sunday, Apr 26th Jeri Babinsky, Gloria Beaudry & Joy Hennig, Kelle & Damian Berry.

We pray for them to feel the blessing of our prayer as deeply as they feel the loving presence of God.

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/>)