



United Congregational Church



VOICES Newsletter

August 2020

Message from Pastor Julie L. Cedrone



Dear friends at United,

Can I begin with anything but a heartfelt thank you to all of you? The pandemic took hold of my life, swirled me around, and I surfaced here at United, ministering to you (mostly) from a virtual space. It was an odd entrance, as someone who is passionate about embodied faith and recently retreated to a digital minimalist lifestyle, to worship and meet via Zoom. It wasn't long (a few days?) before I really began to understand that we are bound beyond the limits of our geography and bodies. Thank you for showing me how profound the Holy Spirit's embrace can be, for your devotion to one another and a vibrant church are the most tangible part of all of this uncertainty. I am grateful for all of you for being simply wonderful.

Yes, the spirit of Christ does join us together, wherever and however we are, as long as we are open to this powerful union. Do we all miss seeing each other in person, the sensory

experiences of hugs and touch and mask-less smiles? Absolutely, we grieve the way we were, and five months into this, we must embrace where we are and boldly march forward.

Jesus had a creative way of using the available communication tools to express his message: parables and sermons, miracles and drama, tender touch and rageful rebukes. We have our own palette of communication tools to work with now: Zoom, Facebook, email, texts, and many more. Being church in a pandemic does not need to be a pause from our faith community; rather, it's an opportunity to redefine who we are, get creative with ministry, discover the technology available to us and how to best use it.

As your bridge pastor, I see my role as not only bridging you between your beloved previous pastor and the next, but bridging United into a united place during a global pandemic: how can we remain woven together during this time and follow God's call for us? It is not what United ever could have imagined at the beginning of this year, and who we will become at the beginning of next year is murkily mysterious.

For sure, not everyone loves Zoom worship or has access to technology, and there are also a number of you who are eager to get back to Merriman Chapel and worship in the sacred space again. Church isn't about the building (this we now know!); yet, the building does matter. We are actively brainstorming about phases of re-opening, creative ways to worship in person as well as master the Zoom experience, and reach out to those who haven't been participating since the pandemic began. Our weekly prayer gatherings continue. We serve where we can. This is a time to envision initiatives around creation justice, how to be good stewards of the earth (stay tuned!), and also a time to work on antiracism as a congregation responding to voices speaking out across the nation. We can enter this time as a pause to many of our external schedules and a deepening of inner life with God.

**With humility and joy and open arms,
Pastor Julie**



WELCOME TO PASTOR JULIE

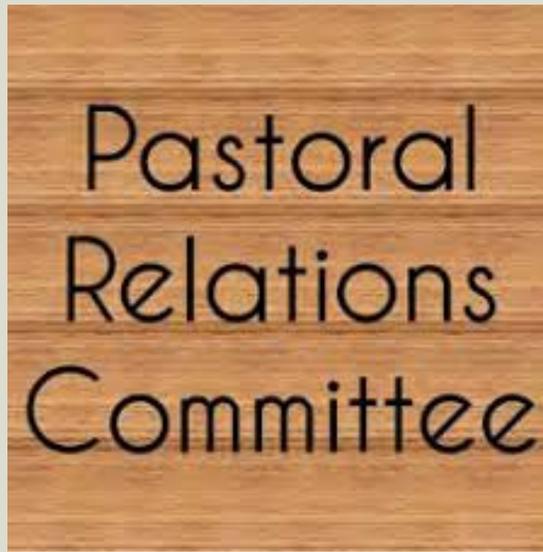
We have the good fortune to have a new Pastor at United Congregational Church! The Reverend Julie L. Cedrone began serving as Bridge Pastor on July 13th, and has done an incredible job transitioning into her new duties, especially considering the exceptional circumstances our church is now in as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. Learning the names of everyone in a congregation, or the routines of a worship service, is always difficult; but imagine doing these when social gatherings are non-existent and every event has to be organized over the internet!

Pastor Julie resides in Northboro with her family, and has previously served as an Associate Church Pastor, as well as a Hospice Chaplin. As any one listening to her first sermons is well aware, Rev. Cedrone has a profound concern for social justice, and welcoming all people. She also has a good sense of humor and the ability to adapt to unforeseen circumstances, traits that are very useful to any Pastor at our church!

Hopefully everyone will have the chance over the next few weeks to personally introduce themselves to our new Pastor. Possible greeting places might include Institute Park in Worcester, or meeting at an outdoor café, if the weather cooperates. I know everyone will be as impressed with Pastor Julie as I was at our first introduction. Meanwhile, please feel free to send her an e-mail, or say hello at our Zoom services on Sunday mornings and Tuesday evenings!

**In Christian Fellowship,
Tim Camp**

PASTORAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE



A new Pastoral Relations Committee has been assembled at United Congregational Church, in response to the recent calling of The Reverend Julie Cedrone as Bridge Pastor. Under our church bylaws, Pastoral Relations works as a liaison between the Pastor and members of the congregation, so that a healthy and cooperative relationship continues between both parties. In short, the Committee tries to make sure that the needs of both the Pastor and the congregation are met, so our church can continue to serve God, and help God's people.

All United members are welcome to bring concerns or suggestions to Pastoral Relations, where these matters will be treated in confidence, and relayed through the confidential advice the team gives the Pastor.

The 3 initial members of Pastoral Relations are:

Tom McMillan (Cell Phone: 978-886-3528)
Ann Rokosky (E-Mail: ann.rokosky@gmail.com)
Tim Camp (Home Phone: 508- 798- 6997)

Please feel free to contact them anytime, and may God's blessing be on you!

Tim Camp



CHURCH UPDATES

United Congregational Church continues to meet the challenges posed by COVID-19! As new circumstances arise, our faith community makes decisions that aim to keep our members safe, while continuing the ministries which are so vitally needed.

The Board of Ministries recently decided to continue our worship services on Zoom until early September, to help prevent the possibility of the virus spreading through in-person gatherings. At the same time, we realize that many members miss the feeling of community that comes from personal greetings. For this reason, a task team has been assembled to determine if physical services can safely resume in the autumn. Obviously a lot of thought will be necessary about proper spacing, disinfecting, and worship practices. We also need to determine how to continue our Zoom streaming, so those who can't attend in person can still participate electronically. These are big tasks, but hopefully plans can be made soon, and opinions solicited about them.

On a similar note, the Church Picnic we normally enjoy at Emerson Brook's place in September has been cancelled. Putting large numbers of people closely together and sharing food is not a wise practice during an epidemic! We may however have some small social gatherings in the months ahead. Our new pastor, The Reverend Julie Cedrone, is currently investigating the possibility of conducting prayer circles with limited numbers of members, and the Board and the Spiritual Life Ministry is trying to set times when United members can meet Julie in person.

Not all developments related to COVID-19 have been negative however. Participation in Sunday services has actually increased, since having our worship services on Zoom has allowed those with health concerns, or church members who have moved, to join us! The Tuesday night prayer services begun shortly after the gathering restrictions were put in place this spring have a robust attendance too, and are now a vital connection for our faith community.

There also has been an explosion of generosity among our congregation in response to this crisis. Members continue to mail their financial pledges to the Church Treasurer, and in fact we have not even experienced the usual summer time lull in giving! United Congregational Church members contributed a record amount to the annual Walk for the Homeless recently, and many have also made generous donations to the Carty Food Cupboard. The tremendous amount of caring for others, and the continuing commitment to our church and the work God has called us to, bodes well for United Congregational Church's future. Our faith will allow us to navigate these difficult circumstances successfully, and let us grow in many ways, so that we will do even greater ministries in the times ahead. In the meanwhile, I thank each of you for your faithfulness, and will keep you in my prayers!

Tim Camp

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ARE YOU A GOOD CITIZEN?

Election season is upon us and it is very important that we all vote. It is one way to let our political leaders know we care about justice and the environment. You may think we live in a blue state and what we do does not matter. It does. Some elections are determined by very few votes. Even if there is no question as to who is the winner, the margin of victory makes a difference. If you have not registered to vote, go online to www.registertovotema.com It is quick and easy.

Massachusetts has passed a law saying during the Covid-19 pandemic we all can vote by mail. Remember, voting by mail is a two step process. You should all have received an official vote by mail application in the mail. It needs to be sent in as soon as possible. For the primary it must be in by August 26. The sooner the better as there may be postal and/or processing delays. You can also vote early in person. If you live in Worcester see where it is at on website: www.worcesterma.gov , Your Vote Counts, or check your local government if you don't.

Submitted By: Emily Castner

United Calendar & Prayer Intentions



CALENDAR:

AUGUST 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, August 2nd: Norma Holmes, Elisabeth & Darrell Hyder, Peggy Israelian.

For Sunday, August 9th: Pat & Peter Keck, Arline & Fred Kimball, Meri Kruse.

For Sunday, August 16th: Ann Lewis, Sandra Johnson, David Maciewski, Nicole & Cooper Belanger.

For Sunday, August 23rd: John MacWade, Scott Malia, Harry Manoogian, Doug McAllister.

For Sunday, August 30th: Michael McAuliffe, Nancy & Tom McMillan, Linda & Bob Michel

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/>)