



United Congregational Church



VOICES Newsletter

April 2016



Message from the Pastor & Sarah Jo Gomez-Lorraine

Dear friends,

Those of you lucky enough to be at worship on April 3rd, when the Jolly Beggars led the music for our Celtic themed worship service, heard me say that I had an ulterior motive in bringing the Beggars to United: a glimpse of my upcoming study leave trip to the island of Iona, off the coast of Scotland. I will be joining a pilgrimage group led by the Shalem Institute of Spiritual Formation (my “spiritual home away from home”) and spending 8 days worshipping with Iona community on this island that has been a center of Celtic spirituality since the 500’s.

Ulterior Motive?! You bet!

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Iona is an island in the “inner Hebrides”, off the coast of Scotland, with a small year round population; because of its ancient remains of hermitages, a nunnery and church, it is a world heritage site.

I have wanted to go to Iona for over 25 years, ever since I first heard about the sacred sites and spiritual community on the island, and so am delighted to finally be able to go! Our days will begin and end with prayer, and include hikes to the different sacred places on the island. The focus of the pilgrimage is deepening our life with God, through time alone and in community – a true time of retreat and renewal.

I don’t know most of the details about the pilgrimage yet – it’s still a month and a half away – but I will absolutely keep you posted! I will be gone from June 1-12; pastoral coverage during that time will be offered by Jo-an Bott (June 1-7) and Gretchen Switzer (June 7-14), and Ann Day and Tom McMillan are lined up as guest preachers.

Blessings,
Nancy

It's time for new beginnings. There is a song with the line, " Every new beginning comes from some other beginning's end. " On May 1,2016 my Field Education comes to a close at United UCC. Many of you have asked what is in store afterwards?

On May 14, 2016 I will be graduating with my Master's in Divinity. Recently, I learned that I was voted by the faculty to be this year's Commencement Speaker for graduation as well. After graduation LaReina and I will fly to Oahu, for a week, where I will be moving forward in my Ordination process. This fall I will return to Andover Newton Theological School to pursue a Master's in Global Interfaith Leadership. As you can see I have many new beginnings coming my way. So why is it so hard to say goodbye?

United UCC you have adopted me as one of your own this year. With each week you gifted me with yours life stories, your smiles and sometimes tears. As Gloria said last week, "You are the church!" You are incredible church! Your purity of heart to strive to be a beloved community has brought me to tears on more than one occasion. You have gifted me by showing me the potential that church can be. Thank you for being exactly who you are United UCC.

This time will be a new beginning for United UCC too. You will progress this year, as you have never been progressed before in this world. I heard the passionate voices of so many outreach projects throughout this year and I pray that what is in your heart comes forward to help serve United Congregational UCC and Worcester. Thank you for the gift of you. I will treasure our time together always. God be with you till we meet again!

Sarah Jo



HELP PREVENT HOMELESSNESS!

United Congregational Church will be participating again in Worcester's annual Walk for the Homeless, scheduled for 2:00 p.m. on Sunday, May 15th. Church members and friends are invited to join the team from United that will walk the 3 mile course from Worcester's Elm Park through various city neighborhoods. There will also be opportunities to support the Walk by financially sponsoring members of our church's team.

Now in its 31st year, The Walk for the Homeless seeks to increase awareness of the growing problem of homelessness, while raising money for a number of local groups providing shelter and/or housing services. The organizations supported by this event include the Central MA. Housing Alliance, which assisted over 9,000 households last year; Friendly House, an agency providing temporary shelter to 84 families; and the Donations Clearinghouse, which helped furnish over 700 homes with used furniture in 2015.

We hope you will consider supporting this event, which has always been fun for the United members involved, and includes a cook-out and entertainment in Elm Park afterwards! Sponsoring in any amount will also be appreciated (just be sure to make checks out to "2016 Walk for the Homeless"). Our church's Mission & Outreach Ministry has also generously agreed to match any donations, so all gifts to the Walk will in effect be doubled!

There will be an information table in Merriman Chapel every Sunday beginning on April 24th with more information on how to sign up for or support the Walk for the Homeless. **United's Walk Coordinator, Tim Camp**, can also be contacted anytime through his e-mail (timbcamp@aol.com), or his home phone (508- 798- 6997). Hope to see you at the Walk!



Camperships and Educational Assistance

United has two scholarship funds which we distribute in the Spring. Applications can be obtained at the church office or contact Pastor Nancy or Carolyn Dzaugis. The applications are due by **June 12th**. They can be sent to the office electronically or by mail and can be turned into the office on a Sunday. There is a task team that will review applications and will make decisions by June 26th. If a decision is needed earlier than June 26th please speak with Pastor Nancy and the task team will meet earlier.

- **Thibault Educational Assistance Fund:** Members of the church -- of all ages -- who have been accepted to an educational institute are eligible to apply.
- **Vibber Bryant Knight Camp Fund:** This fund provides scholarships for members (or children of members) who are attending camps or other summer programming.



ANNUAL PROGRAM MEETING

Plan to Attend the Annual Program and Covenant Ministries Meeting, Sunday, May 22nd after Worship. Reports will be presented regarding the life and work of our Congregation during the 2015-2016 Program Year.

A Slate of Officers and Ministry Members will be presented for a vote.

We will celebrate the work and dedication of the many Members of our Congregation who have participated in the life and work of our Congregation.



Community & Fellowship News ~

May 15th -- Plant Swap ~ Bring and take plants before and after church. Also consider the folks who live in an apartment -- they may like some of your surplus houseplants. A good time to divide them now and pot them up.

Also on **May 15** -- Our own Tom McMillan will lead a session on a "Contemplative Photography" right after church. (See more below) This walking tour of an hour or so will help us to observe (and photograph if you wish) our urban landscape that we overlook, take for granted, do not consider. Tom says we'll be practicing what the Japanese call wabi-sabi, accepting transience and imperfection, which he assures us we should have no difficulty encountering.

MESSAGES FROM TOM MCMILLAN:

United Photo Walk

Marcel Proust said that “the real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.” One way to get those new eyes is to see the world through the lens of a camera. On May 15 right after worship Tom McMillan will lead a photo walk around our familiar United landscape. You don't need to have any photographic experience or a fancy camera (a cell phone will work), just curiosity and interest in truly seeing what you may have merely noticed but previously taken for granted. Questions? Contact Tom McMillan at 978-886-3528 or trm06238@yahoo.com.

Progressive Christian Discussion Series

Many people equate Christianity with the Religious Right and assume that all Christians share its beliefs and values on issues like biblical inerrancy, gay rights, abortion, creationism, to name only a few. At United we know there is another way to understand and practice Christianity. It's not enough to say we don't agree with the Religious Right, though. We need to be able to articulate positively what we do believe. So mark your calendar and plan to join us after worship each Sunday in June for a lively and enlightening conversation on how Progressive Christians understand God, the Bible, and Jesus, and how we put our understanding into practice. Questions? Contact Tom McMillan in person or at 978-886-3528 or trm06238@yahoo.com or Katherine Orcutt : korcutt459@gmail.com or 978-884-2466.



Russian Icon Museum Outing

MAY 1, LEAVING CHURCH AT 12:30 PM

What is an icon? No, no, not the little pictures which appear on your computer screen! These are beautiful pictorial representations of Jesus, Mary, the Saints, and other Biblical characters which are venerated in the Orthodox Church. The Museum of Russian Icons, in Clinton, MA contains the largest collection of Russian icons in North America.

The Fellowship committee is sponsoring a trip to the Museum on Sunday, May 1, immediately after church. We have been promised a docent to guide us through the history of icons and explain how this magnificent collection came to the area. In addition there is currently on display a collection of nesting Russian dolls which should be of interest to “youngsters of all ages.”

Admission is \$5 for adults; financial assistance available, simply contact Nancy. Please sign the list on the Fellowship table if interested so that we can arrange for a bus if needed, otherwise we will plan on carpooling for the trip.

United Calendar

April 27	BOM Meeting
May 1	Russian Icon Museum Outing
May 8	TPC Meeting
May 9	Carty Food Cupboard

May 11	UCC Knitters Club Meeting
May 15	SLDM Meeting
May 15	Contemplative Photography Outing w/Tom McMillan
May 15	Plant Swap
May 15	Walk for the Homeless
May 22	Annual Program Meeting

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/>)



UCC NEWS

Keep it in the Ground

April 04, 2016

Written by Barb Powell

As part of Earth Day weekend, UCC preachers around the country will deliver sermons April 24 proclaiming "Keep it in the ground."

The message — referring to fossil fuel reserves — is "the most important act of caring for God's creation that our society can undertake today," said the Rev. Brooks Berndt, the UCC's minister for environmental justice. Berndt and the Rev. Jim Antal, conference minister and president of the UCC's Massachusetts Conference, are organizing the Earth Day preach-in as April's "Our Stillspeaking Voice," the UCC's monthly multimedia event initiative.

"Embracing renewable energy sources while insisting that we keep 80 percent of the known fossil fuel reserves in the ground is an act of faithfulness to a loving, life-affirming God," said Antal. "Allowing our current fossil fuel dependent economy to continue is a death sentence for life as we have always known it, and an abomination to any understanding of God."

The preach-in will feature 25 preachers, a scholar and a local church. Local UCC pastors are encouraged to "join the April 24 preach-in and devote their worship services and sermon to 'Keep in in the Ground,'" said Berndt. Pastors and congregations can find sermon seeds, liturgical helps, and other resources on the website, <http://april2016.uccpages.org/>

Nationally-known environmental activist Bill McKibben, founder of the global climate movement 350.org and Diana Butler Bass, are among the participants. Butler Bass' book — which explores how people find their spiritual ground and embrace God in the soil, the water, the sky, in our homes and neighborhoods, and in the wider world — will be the subject of an April

sermon series, “Treehuggers,” at the 4,000-member Cathedral of Hope UCC in Dallas.

"We have to keep 80 percent of the fossil-fuel reserves that we know about underground," McKibben told Yes magazine in February. "If we don't — if we dig up the coal and oil and gas and burn them — we will overwhelm the planet's physical systems, heating the Earth far past the red lines drawn by scientists and governments. It's not 'we should do this,' or 'we'd be wise to do this.' Instead it's simpler: 'We have to do this.'"

I think we ought to aim for keeping most of the remaining oil in the ground because I am a common sense kind of gal," said the Rev. Donna Schaper, senior minister of Judson Memorial UCC in New York City and featured preach-in preacher. "We all know that something big has to change. People of faith declare at Easter that we can rise again. We can! But without common sense applied to fossil fuels, we will actually sink ourselves and our beloved earth."

Antal concurred. "Every day, science tells us more about the end of nature as we have known it. The five warmest months in the past 170 years have been the last five months," he said. "It falls to us to launch the greatest social change movement the world has ever known. This can only happen if religion — which is the most powerful force on earth — channels the resolve of its adherents to make the changes science says we must, so that our children will know something of the Eden into which we were born."
