



United Congregational Church



VOICES Newsletter

December 2020

Message from Pastor Julie L. Cedrone



Dear United friends,

All week, I have been listening to and singing the lines from Isaiah energized by *Godspell* – Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord. The cry at the beginning captivates me, the silent pauses as much music as the call, then a clear voice draws me in, followed by the buoyant chorus adding their layers and beat. I wonder if we can embody this soundtrack, moving through Advent with this kind of enthused passion for Jesus's birth? It certainly presents a musical contrast to the news, an entirely different octave and energy, and I can't think of a better way to pray my way through this week than starting my day with a few rounds of "Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord." Truthfully, that's what we're here to now, prepare a way, allowing the anticipation to fuel us through these uncertain times and forge a straight path to Christmas.

Are you prepared? This year, it's not about travel and scrambling at the mall or enjoying concerts in a crowd; yes, we grieve these familiar togetherness traditions, but perhaps we also return to the purity of this time, which is all about purification and inner

preparation. How do we create a sense of expansiveness on the inside that welcomes Jesus into our being? How do we wrestle with and release anything toxic, tense, or tight to allow more space for big joy and grand generosity? This is a time to breathe and savor the hush that can come with dark evenings and shorter days, a season of more sleep, quiet, and rest.

I have been thinking about Sturbridge Village's annual "Candlelight Christmas" event, and the docent who explained that December in the 1830s was a time to embrace darkness and hibernate, absorb all the activity from the year and let it settle in. Christmas wasn't a widely-celebrated holiday, certainly not with any of the hype and pizzazz that we know. I remember this now, dwelling in this year's December, and realizing that our traditions evolve as our world does, and maybe we can find the sensibility in this cosmic pause button that has been pushed to much of the holiday frenzy and enjoy the quiet. It seems more natural and healthy to cozy up over the winter months, be able to sit peacefully in the darkness.

So, as my bridge pastor position has nearly crossed from the sweltering summer to my final day in Epiphany, I am trying to garner all the gifts of this adventure with you and be mindful about these next few festive weeks. The remaining prayer gatherings will have a few quieter times for introspection, and a few livelier explorations for engaging with theopolitics in real life. We'll strive for one more opportunity to worship together – it may be in an unconventional form – decorating our chapel in timeslots, playing with the nativity set one family at a time, praying in the sanctuary while Mae graces us with familiar melodies. Through it all, may we focus on how to prepare for the birth of Jesus, for we need this miracle more than ever.

With love,
Pastor Julie

THANK YOU NOTES FROM MICHELLE COLLINS & FROM IHN!



Nov. 22, 2020

Dear United Congregational Church,

Thank you very much for the birthday card! I received several + many phone calls. We had a nice party, where we had Kentucky Fried chicken + a strawberry shortcake. My mother sent me flowers (which are now blooming), and my friend took me out to lunch.

Hope all goes well. Love,
Michelle



November 19, 2020

United Congregational Church
6 Institute Road
Worcester, MA 01609

Dear United Congregational Church:

On behalf of the Interfaith Hospitality Network of Greater Worcester I would like to thank you for the generous financial contribution towards the improvement of our garage doors and the ongoing support of our program.

IHN provides a safe, supportive environment for families who are experiencing homelessness. Last year we provided housing, meals, and case management/referral services to 22 families who had nowhere else to turn for help. IHN's staff and volunteers are able to do this work thanks to the generosity of you, our donors. Your financial contribution makes it possible for us to continue offering a temporary home to families in crisis.

We are truly grateful for all that you do for our families and our program, and we thank you for helping us in our continued efforts to provide shelter and assistance to families who have no place to call home.

Sincerely,

Michelle Beaver
Michelle Beaver

Director, IHN of Greater Worcester



Holiday 2020, United Congregational

December 13th - St. Lucia Day, 3rd Sunday of Advent

Merriman Chapel is open for tree trimming and mission projects, by reservation
Pageant costumes and script ready for distribution.

December 20th - Zoom Christmas pageant, 4th Sunday of Advent

December 24th - Journey to Bethlehem

Sanctuary is open from 1:00pm to 7:00pm for candlelight, contemplative worship experience and a walking meditation in twinkling lights immersed in music, scripture, and prayer. Time slots by reservation.

December 27- Pajama Sunday

January 3rd - Three Kings Day

~~~~~ Julie's last Sunday~~~~~



## REMEMBERING NORMA HOLMES

We give thanks for the life of Norma Holmes, faithful Light of God and beloved member of United, and a church member since April, 1957.

Our church fondly remembers Norma Holmes, who passed away on November 30<sup>th</sup>, at the age of 99.

Our condolences go to the Holmes family, as members cherish their own memories of a woman who was a blessing to United's community of faith!



## **FIGHTING HUNGER & HOMELESSNESS**

We all know that food and housing insecurity is increasing across the country. The pandemic and the resulting increase in unemployment have resulted in ever more families experiencing hunger, or facing eviction. Fortunately, there has also been an increase in people stepping up to help those in need.

United Congregational Church has certainly been part of this effort to help others. During our food drive last month, church members purchased hundreds of non-perishable food items for the Carty Food Cupboard. The amount donated was truly incredible, filling the pickup truck used for delivery! In addition, grocery gift cards were also donated by several members. Carty's coordinator thanks United, noting that these gifts were very much needed, as the Cupboard had run low on supplies meeting extra requests for food during Thanksgiving.

Our congregation has also responded to the current hunger and housing crisis by supporting organizations working to alleviate these issues. Our members are once again providing meals at the John Street Baptist Church Soup Kitchen. United members have continued to give financial donations and volunteer at the Greater Worcester Interfaith Hospitality Network, a temporary shelter for homeless families. In addition, many members have raised funds for housing service providers by purchasing gift cards through the Hope For Housing program. These cards can be used for their full face value at participating stores (such as Stop & Shop, Big Y, Shaws' and CVS), which give a percentage of the profits to organizations like the Central MA Housing Alliance.

Many thanks go to our congregation, whose generosity has certainly made a difference in the lives of many. In the challenging months ahead, may we continue to follow the call found in Matthew 25, to care for God's children who are in need. Anyone wanting to help these efforts, or desiring more information on Hope For Housing cards or the Carty Cupboard, should contact me. Thanks again, and God bless!

**Tim Camp**

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## **PASTOR SEARCH DEVELOPMENTS**

**I am pleased to report some positive developments in our search for United Congregational Church's next Settled Pastor. After months of work, our Church Profile is finally completed, and will be posted soon on the clergy employment site of the United Church of Christ. Many thanks to everyone who participated in the recent church survey! Your answers helped us write an accurate description of our community of faith, and describe the qualities we need in our next Settled Pastor.**

**Our next step will be assembling a Search Team to evaluate the candidates, once the applications for the Settled Pastor position begin arriving. Our goal is to have this team represent the incredible diversity of United's membership, and our church's major ministries. More details on the planned composition of the team will be included in the January issue of Voices.**

**Of course, while we search for a Settled Pastor, we also have to make arrangements for temporary pastoral coverage. The Reverend Julie Cedrone celebrates her last Sunday with us on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, as her 6 month contract draws to a close. We wish Pastor Julie the best as she begins a new, full time ministry at a West Boylston church.**

**Meanwhile, most of the team who recommended Rev. Cedrone for her temporary Bridge Pastor position has been reassembled to search for her successor. This team has already begun receiving applications for Bridge Pastor, and will start their candidate evaluations soon. Our hope is to have another Bridge Pastor in place by the beginning of February, so that worship and care of church members can proceed without interruption.**

**This year has certainly been a time of uncertainty, and also a fair amount of stress. Yet we will be successful in attracting a Settled Pastor in the coming year; one who, like our last several Pastors, will work well with the congregation, and truly care for all its members. The tremendous resiliency of United Congregational Church has also been apparent in this time of transition. Members have continued to be faithful disciples, supporting each other and the many ministries of our church. We are truly a blessed community, and I know God will guide into even better times ahead!  
In Christian Fellowship,**

**Tim Camp**

**E-Mail: [timbcamp@aol.com](mailto:timbcamp@aol.com);**

**Home Phone: 508- 798- 6997**

## United Calendar & Prayer Intentions



### CALENDAR:

### DECEMBER 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, December 6th: Emily Castner, Julie Cedrone, Diana Coffin.

For Sunday, December 13<sup>th</sup>: Jannatha Coffin & Nate Malia, Mary Collins, Michelle Collins.

For Sunday, December 20<sup>th</sup>: Ricardo Coloma, Michael Comer. Dee & Dave Cote.

For Sunday, December 27<sup>th</sup>: Debra Cottis, Ann Day & Donna Enberg, Caroyln Dik.

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

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Please notify the church office by phone (508-752-3785) or at: staff@ucc-worcester.org of any change of your address. With the New-Pastor-Search, physical mailings are being sent out, and it is more important than ever now to have your current home address on file in the system.

Thanks very much!

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/>)