



# United Congregational Church



VOICES Newsletter

December 2015



Dear friends,

## Message from the Pastor

*It was a time like this,  
War & tumult of war,  
a horror in the air.  
Hungry yawned the abyss –*

*and they there came the star  
and the child most wonderfully there.*

*It was a time like this  
of fear & lust for power,  
license & greed and blight –  
and yet the Prince of bliss  
came into the darkest hour  
in quiet & silent night.*

*And in a time like this  
how celebrate his birth  
when all things fall apart?  
Ah! wonderful it is  
with no room on the earth  
the stable is our heart.*

In this time when we are so deeply seeking Advent hope, what a gift it is to hear the voice of Madeleine L'Engle. The events of the past month have been overwhelming: acts of terrorism, of violence, of hate, and of fear...All around us – in media, from world leaders, from politicians and those hoping to hold our country's highest office – we hear words of aggression, of denial, of arrogance and eagerness for battle....And we who long for the Messiah – the Prince of Peace, the embodiment of Justice and Grace – wonder where God is and how we will ever glimpse signs of God's coming....

What a blessing it is to be reminded of the power of love – God's own love, dwelling firmly and wholly in our own hearts. We have holy power ~ truly, we do! And we embody this power when we refuse to let fear and hate and violence have the last word.

Never think – for one moment – that we can't make a difference in this world...never think that our voices, our prayers, our actions are too small to be of service to God ~ too small to radiate the love of God, the presence of God in this world that has such great need of it. Rather, know this: Emmanuel – God with us, within us and among us – will come to us. My prayer is that our hearts be ready ~ open for God's love to enter the world through us.

*Advent blessings,  
Nancy*

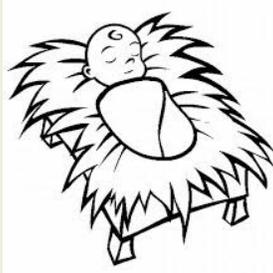
## Shalom Bed and Breakfast ~ December 20<sup>th</sup>!



Are you planning a trip to Bethlehem? Perhaps for the upcoming census? Then you'll want to be one of the guests at the Shalom Bed and Breakfast, Bethlehem's finest boarding, eating and worshipping establishment! Rooms (and seats!) are available for Sunday, December 20<sup>th</sup> and the registration begins promptly at 10:30! Hope to see you there!

**November 1st** is All Saints Day, when we remember loved ones who have died this past year. We will lift up in prayer the names of United members who have died since last All Saints Day, and there will be an opportunity for anyone who chooses to light a candle in memory of a loved one. Chris Vece and Dave Uhl will join Jannatha in providing special music for this service that is both solemn and celebratory, as we honor and give thanks for the blessed and beloved saints in our lives.

## Christmas Eve



We will gather for a traditional candlelight service of Lessons and Carols on Christmas Eve at 5:30 in the Sanctuary. Please join us for this lovely evening service as we welcome the newborn Christ Child into our world!

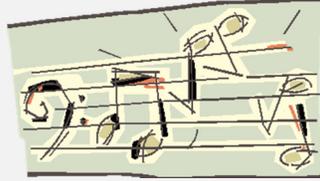
## Christmas Poinsettias



Thank you to all who donated poinsettias this holiday season! If you would like to bring your poinsettia home, please take it after the Christmas Eve service or after worship on December 27<sup>th</sup>. Poinsettias not taken will be given to our less mobile members.



## January is Music Month at United!



I hope everyone is having a wonderful December, and a fantastic Advent season! I'm excited to announce that January will be **Music Month** at United. We have so many talented musicians in our midst. I'd like to give all of them an opportunity to bring their talents to the forefront on Sunday mornings! If you sing or play an instrument, please let me know. I'd like to have different musicians do the prelude and/or offertory throughout January.

We will also be singing at least one new hymn each week of the month. There has been a very positive response to some of the more contemporary pieces we've tried recently, and I'd love to expand our repertoire even more.

Please look for an insert in your bulletin in the next few weeks. If you have a favorite hymn or hymns...be they old or new...please indicate that in the insert so we can incorporate more of your favorites into worship.

Lastly, please consider joining the Pick Up Choir. We'll be meeting every third Sunday of each month at 9:45 to rehearse and sing during that morning's service. The more the merrier! Even if you haven't sung before, we'd love to have you.

If you have any other musical thoughts, ideas, or comments or would like to take part musically in the service in January, please let me know!

Jannatha Coffin

### Please Note!



Nancy will be on vacation **January 11-17**; in case of pastoral concerns or emergency, please contact Serena Leiser (508-870-3242) or the church office.



### In Memorium

We hold in our prayers the family of D. Gordon Warman, a long-time member of United, who died this past November. Gordon was involved with many of the ministries at United for many years, until he and his wife Joanne moved to Florida twenty years ago. A memorial service celebrating his life was held at United on November 28th. We give thanks for Gordon's faithful service and ask God's comfort for his family in their loss.

### Calendar - United and the Central MA UCC

January 10 - Spiritual Life and Diaconate  
January 10 - TPC Meeting  
January 10 - Soup & Spark Luncheon

## 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



### A Letter from Minister and President of MACUCC, Jim Antel

HELP LAUNCH STILL SPEAKING 2.0 TODAY!!

Even MORE Advent blessings to you and your congregation!

God is Still Speaking 2.0 launches TODAY! And I'm hoping you will be part of that launch. Please take a moment today – and throughout December – to join with thousands of other UCCers all over the country as we share our UCC values with a world eager to know that a church like the UCC exists and that our doors are open!

In an email I asked you to review the 16 postcards found on the following link, each with a brief, witty explanation that helps to describe the core values of the United Church of Christ to complete strangers – many of whom we hope are looking for exactly the kind of church we are! Here's that link: [http://uccfiles.com/pdf/UCC\\_social\\_catalogue.pdf](http://uccfiles.com/pdf/UCC_social_catalogue.pdf). **Go to this site to find the postcards and instructions.** (Instructions can also be found below.) [http://www.ucc.org/social\\_media\\_postcards](http://www.ucc.org/social_media_postcards)

Have fun with them. I recommend using about two of them a week. Make sure every member of your church is invited to play along. See how many reposts, retweets, shares, likes, loves, etc. you can generate with each one. Add your own witty banter to each meme as you post them.

The Mass Conference is now part of a team that is going to make every good effort to tell the world that the United Church of Christ is here to welcome them, no matter who they are or where they are on life's journey.

YOU ARE THE KEY TO MAKING THIS PILOT WORK! Come January, the whole UCC will get to play along. For now, along with a few other Conferences, we have a head start. Your learnings and experience will help us refine this project as we look to 2016 to fully launch our Stillspeaking 2.0 campaign. Let it no longer be said of the United Church of Christ that we are the 'best kept secret in America.' It is time for us to show the world what we do and who we are - and how the gospel comes alive through our faithful proclamation of God's redeeming and transformative love.

#### How to Use the New UCC Social Media Postcards

Go to [http://uccfiles.com/pdf/UCC\\_social\\_catalogue.pdf](http://uccfiles.com/pdf/UCC_social_catalogue.pdf). Take some time reading through each one of the 16 new social media postcards that you will find there.

- Choose the postcard(s) you want to post.
- Now click on this link: [http://www.ucc.org/social\\_media\\_postcards](http://www.ucc.org/social_media_postcards) Follow the instructions on this link, and from this link, download the image you have chosen so you can use it in your social media.
- Track the number of "likes" and "shares" your postcard(s) receive, and provide that feedback **to**

**Tiffany Vail [VailT@macucc.org](mailto:VailT@macucc.org) by December 31.**

- If there are any reactions or there is any feedback of note, please pass that on **to Tiffany Vail [VailT@macucc.org](mailto:VailT@macucc.org)**. This is the pilot project for a program that the whole UCC will utilize for the next year. Feedback on what is working, what missed the mark, how readers are responding or reacting – matter to us. If there are any valuable insights that occur as you are engaged in this, please share those stories with us so that we can make good use of them.