



United Congregational Church



VOICES Newsletter

February 2016

Message from the Pastor



Dear Friends,
Ginny Woodbury recently gave me an issue of "United Voices" from January 2001, which included a column called "Perspective from the Pew", written by her husband, John. In it, he wrote: *Several weeks ago, I was talking with our Moderator, Ruth Evans. She asked me if I saw the making of a great church in United Congregational. I said, Yes. But then I tried to define to myself, what is a great church?*

First, greatness in a church should not be defined in terms of budget size. Nor congregation size. Nor in the quality of its music. Not in the number of special committees. Although our church may have some of the aforementioned qualities, true greatness lies elsewhere. In my opinion, greatness lies in its people and in their relationship to each other and to God.....

Amen!

I've been at United for five years now, and can say without any doubt that we are not now the church we were when I began here. We have created a wonderful worship space in Merriman Chapel, have received many new members (just under 50 since 2.12), have said farewell to others who have moved or died, and are continually finding ways to adjust to the needs and dreams of our changing congregation. The constant has been United's "greatness" – your commitment to (my words, here, but faithful to what John Woodbury meant!): *Love God and love God's people, serve God and serve God's people, praise God and praise God's people!*

As a congregation, we are engaged in what we're calling "Spirit, Story, Spark" – a way for us to learn and reflect on how the Spirit has moved and Sparked through the Story of United ~ and is continuing to do so! In our first gathering, we shared stories of how we first came to United, why we came back, and stories or memories about United we wanted told. Again and again, people talked about the welcome they received and community they experience here in worship, fellowship and outreach. We have covered the walls of Merriman Chapel with a time line of the history of United and the stories of our members – here, too, we see the "greatness" of our relationships to one another and our deep desire and commitment to be faithful to God.

One of the wonderful treasures uncovered recently is a list compiled in 1999 of "Heritage Members" – people who at that time had been members for 50 or more years. The list isn't complete (and any long-time members who would like to see and help edit it – let me know!) – but I was delighted to see the following names among those on the list – some we still see every (or almost every!) week, others are less mobile – each one so vitally part of the story of this always changing community of faith:

Fred Kimball (1937), Carolyn Dik (1941), Emerson Brooks and Virginia Woodbury (1943), George Blanchard and Marian Lord (1944), Nancy Blanchard and Harry Manoogian (1946), Warren Page (1949)

How blessed are we to have had so many people of such great faith come before us ~ and still part of our

community! How blessed are we today, to see what has grown from the seeds sown over the almost 300 years since the First Church (Congregational) – our forebears – was founded!

John Woodbury ended his column with these words:

God is our strength and our redeemer and we can reach him through our enthusiasm for United. Let us love one another. Let us be enthusiastic for God.

May it be so!

Blessings to all,

Nancy

February 28th: Annual Financial Meeting and Farewell to Serena Leiser



Our annual financial meeting will take place immediately after church on February 28th. After the business ~ the celebration, as we honor Serena's ministry with us as a seminary student for the past year and a half. Serena will be moving to Delaware in March; we are grateful for her time with us and pray for God's blessings upon her in this next adventure!

March 6th: Spirit, Story, Spark #3!



On March 6th, we will welcome the Rev. Kelly Gallagher, our area minister, as our guest preacher. We'll have our third "Spirit, Story, Spark" gathering after church ~ and over lunch! Please join us as we consider how the Spirit is Sparking United now ~ and what might be Sparked going forward!

Lenten Prayer Gatherings



All are invited to be part of our Lenten prayer gatherings, either on Wednesday evenings from 7-8 (except on February 24, when we will meet from 6-7!) or Sundays, after church, from 12-1. This is a time for quiet reflection, prayer and conversation, as we journey through the season of Lent together. If you haven't picked up a copy of the Lenten devotional booklet, "*Everything is Grace*", there are still a few copies left on the sign up table in Merriman Chapel.

Holy Week Services:

Sunday March 20 begins Holy Week with **Palm Sunday**.

Thursday March 24th at 7:00 in Merriman Chapel is the quiet, contemplative, candle-lit service for **Maundy Thursday**.

Friday March 25th at noon in Merriman Chapel is the solemn **Good Friday service**.

Easter Sunday on March 27th will be celebrated on 10:30 in the Sarah Wyman Whitman Gallery (the former sanctuary) with music of trumpet and organ.



Easter Flowers

I know – it seems WAY too early to begin thinking about Easter flowers given in memory or honor of loved ones!! However – please note that the deadline for orders for Easter flowers will be March 20th. An order form will be in the bulletins closer to the date, or you can call the church office to order flowers; cost for Easter flowers will be: ***Easter Lilies & Tulip Plants @ \$11.00/each.***

Calendar - United and the Central MA UCC

February 24	Wednesday Lenten Prayer Gathering
February 24	Board of Ministries Meeting
February 28	Annual Financial Meeting & Farewell to Serena Leiser
March 2	Wednesday Lenten Prayer Gathering
March 6	Spirit, Story, Spark Lunch – Meeting with Kelly Gallagher
March 9	Wednesday Lenten Prayer Gathering
March 13	SLDM Meeting
March 16	Wednesday Lenten Prayer Gathering

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

Super Saturday March 12, 2016 8:00 am

The Reverend Traci Blackmon - Community Leader, Civil Rights Activist and Pastor of Christ the King UCC in Florissant, Missouri - is the Keynote Speaker for this day of worship, workshops, and networking for lay and clergy leaders from across Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. Join us for a great day of learning and leadership.

Super Saturday - March 12, 2016

Connecticut Conference will be hosting the March Super Saturday

Location: Killingly High School, 226 Putnam Pike, Killingly, CT

<https://www.regonline.com/Register/Checkin.aspx?EventID=1809045>

Only 35 Miles from Worcester

Buses will be available throughout state for ride-sharing

\$54.00 Per Person or \$44.00 Per Person in Groups of 5 or more from a church.

<https://www.regonline.com/Register/Checkin.aspx?EventID=1809045>

The CT Conference UCC is pleased to continue its collaboration with sister Conferences in MA and RI as we co-sponsor and host SUPER SATURDAY! March 2016.

About the Workshops

Lots to choose from; over 40! Here are some of the highlights: Our Conference Minister, Rev. Kent Siladi and the Minister/President of the Massachusetts Conference, Rev. Jim Antal, will be fresh off the plane (and jet-lagged!) as they present a workshop, "First Hand Report: The Middle East."

There will be a workshop for moderators and board heads in times of change; and workshops focusing on discerning and listening for God, stewardship programs, cultivating healthy church endowments, transition teams, and testing your church's vital signs.

There'll be a workshop on mission trips for adults, taking church to where the people are, and skills for chaperones. And a workshop on how to make a great church web site. And one on using eBooks for your writing ministry.

And a workshop entitled, "Church vs. Sports: Taking On the Over-Scheduled World," as well as one on

building resilience. How about a workshop about effectively welcoming children in worship? Or creating memorable church school experiences?

There's even more, but you get the picture! The value of networking and exchanging information and ideas and gaining new perspectives and inspiration is what makes this day so worthwhile!

