



United Congregational Church



VOICES Newsletter

February 2018



Message from Deborah Devine

Proverbs 22:6 "Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it."

As many of you know, I recently had the privilege of a 10-day pilgrimage to Israel and Palestine with a group of professors and students from Andover Newton Theological School and Yale Divinity School. One of the major themes of the trip was religious education. I have always been quite passionate about families and faith and the practices in which we live out and teach our faith to our children.

In my admissions essay for ANTS I wrote, "I am passionate about the need for families to lead faithful and faith filled lives. Raising a family in today's world is at the very least a monumental challenge."

In Israel/Palestine I saw some beautiful examples of how this sentiment is being carried out. At our trips to the Frankel School in Jerusalem, the Dror Elementary School in Haifa, and the Yemin Orde Youth Village we were greeted with passionate, dedicated, and caring teachers, principals, and social workers. It was refreshing to see that faith played an important part in the education of many of the families connected to these schools. Each of these schools honored the faith path that the families had chosen for their children and spent time ensuring that this faith was also learned in school. Each of these schools wanted their children to concretely know that they were a beloved child of God.

I was especially struck by the tree of blessings (see the picture below) that was in one of the classrooms of an elementary school that we visited. This tree held a prayer, or a blessing, for each child that was written by their parent. What a powerful reminder to the children that their parents love them and are praying for them!

Another thing that really stood out for me was the passion and commitment that the administrators at the Yemin Orde Youth Village had for the teens there. The school was self-described as a "last resort" for teens that have used up all of their other options. The concepts that they teach these kids to lift them back up, and in turn help them to be successful and feel loved and worthy, were overwhelmingly heartwarming.

The philosophy that we so well know from Hillary Clinton that "It takes a village" is taken very seriously there. They do not become these kids' parents, but they strive to rebuild broken relationships with parents and to keep them involved. The principal said, "These kids have a lot of puss and they need to get it out." They take seriously the "getting it out" part. They

want the kids to develop their own personal narrative and come to terms with it. The teens are constantly reminded that the school and its staff are in it for the long haul. The ultimate goal is for each child to know, "I am worthwhile to invest in myself." They do this by helping to mend each child's heart and helping them to find a place where they can shine and make the world a better place. What can be more faithful than that?

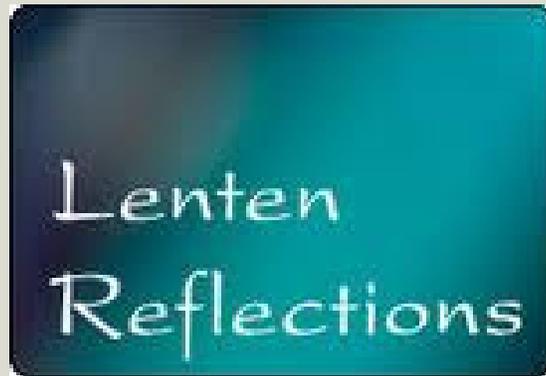
Blessings and peace to you,

Debbie Duval
Student Pastor



ECCLESIASTICAL COUNCIL FOR DEBRA COTTIS

On **Wednesday March 14th, at 7:00**, we will host area churches gathering for Debra Cottis' Ecclesiastical Council. Debra is a hospice chaplain and chaplain for Safe Homes, a drop-in center for LGBT youth. She has been attending United for several years now, and joined in January 2017. Her Ecclesiastical Council is the final step in her discernment process toward ordination, and is an opportunity for clergy and lay delegates from church in the Central Association to meet with her and ask her questions about her theology and faith journey. It is an honor for us to sponsor Debra for ordination, and I hope as many of you who are able will be at her Council. While members of United are not able to take part in the vote approving her for ordination, we can support her with our presence, our prayer, and our thoughtful questions at her Council!



LENTEN BOOK DISCUSSION:

SUNDAYS; MARCH 4TH, 11TH AND 18TH FROM 11:30 AM - 1:00 PM

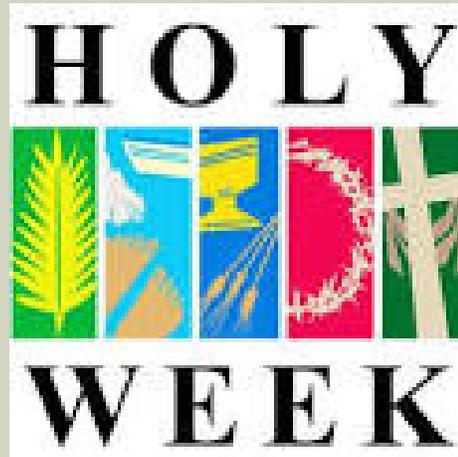
Please join us for a book discussion, led by Debbie Duval, of "**No Innocent Bystanders - Becoming an Ally in the Struggle for Justice**" written by Shannon Craigo-Snell and Christopher Doucot.

This book is a start-up guide for spiritual or religious people who are interested in working for social justice but don't know how or where to begin, drawing on the lessons of history, the framework of Christian ideas, and the insights of contemporary activists. It offers practical guidance on how to meaningfully and mindfully advocate alongside all who struggle for a more just society.

You can purchase the book from Amazon at:

<https://www.amazon.com/No-Innocent-Bystanders-Becoming-Struggle/dp/06642...>

For any questions, or if you are interested in attending, please contact Debbie Duval at debbieduva@aol.com



LOOKING AHEAD TO HOLY WEEK AND EASTER:

Palm Sunday: March 25th

Maundy Thursday: March 29th, candlelight service at 7:00 in Merriman Chapel.

Good Friday: March 30th, meditative service in Merriman Chapel at 12:00 noon.

Easter Sunday: April 1st, a joyous celebration of Christ's Resurrection, 10:30 in the Gallery (former Sanctuary); music of trumpet and organ.

CARTY CUPBOARD REMINDER

The Carty Cupboard can always use donations of non-perishable foods such as Cereal, Soup, Canned Fruit, Peanut Butter & Jelly, Rice, Pasta and Pasta Sauce. Especially useful are the low salt, low sugar and/or whole grain varieties of the above items. Carty is also currently looking for personal hygiene items such as soap, shampoo, toothpaste and deodorants. All donations will be appreciated, and can be left in the collection hamper in Merriman Chapel.

Carty is one of the largest food pantries in Worcester, and serves hundreds in need each month. Our congregation is one of several in the downtown area assisting Carty in its mission to ensure that no one goes hungry. A group of United Congregational members has also been distributing food at Carty on Monday evenings for the last few years, and will gladly welcome anyone who wants to join this ministry. For more information about donations or volunteering, please contact United member Tim Camp anytime at timbcamp@aol.com, or his home phone (508- 798- 6997).

With thanks to all who support Carty and its vital mission,

United's Missions & Outreach Ministry



PUB THEOLOGY

You may have heard talk about the "Pub Theology" group at United. Well, it's real ~ and you're invited! If you're thinking, *Huh? Pub Theology?!* here's a brief description:

Pub Theology is small monthly get-togethers to share a beverage (alcoholic or otherwise), maybe a munchie, and to discuss some theological topic in a very informal way. All that is required is curiosity, an open mind, and an interest in getting together with others who want to talk about faith, belief ~ you name it, we'll talk about it! Free-wheeling conversation is the goal.

Pub Theology gatherings have sprung up around the country, and we're delighted to offer one now right in our own backyard! *All are invited to come on the first Wednesday of each month, at 7:00, to the Sahara (143 Highland St. Worcester), and join the conversation! Check with Tom McMillan, Katherine Orcutt or Nancy Elder-Wilfrid if you have questions...*



IHN -- Interfaith Hospitality Network

The Mission and Outreach Ministry is looking to see if anyone in the congregation would like to volunteer to be the contact person with Interfaith Hospitality Network (IHN). United has a long relationship with IHN which provides temporary housing to families in need. United was a host congregation for many years and we now support them primarily through our financial contributions. The contact person will help to ensure that communications from INN get out to the congregation. Please let Andy Dzaugis, Adzaugis@aol.com, or Pastor Nancy know if you are interested or if you have any questions.

Thank you, Mission and Outreach Ministry



The Interfaith Hospitality Network Presents:

An Evening of Hope

Our first annual Evening of Hope will take place on Saturday, March 3rd from 7:00-10:00 pm at Notre Dame Academy, at 425 Salisbury St, in Worcester. The event will feature the opportunity to sample wines, enjoy appetizers and small plates, and spend a lovely Saturday evening with friends and community members--all for a wonderful cause. The evening will include a silent auction. Tickets are \$75 and can be purchased at ihnworchester.org. We hope you can join us to celebrate our 20th year serving those in need! Thank you.

United Calendar



- Feb 25 Annual Financial Meeting (after Worship service)
Feb 26 Carty Food Cupboard ~ 5:30 pm (Wesley Methodist Church)
March 4th, 11th, 18th Lenten Book Discussion 11:30am - 1:00pm (Debbie Duval)
March 7 Pub Theology ~ 7:00 pm at Sahara (143 Highland St, Worcester)
March 26 Carty Food Cupboard ~ 5:30 pm (Wesley Methodist Church)

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/>)





Ad Hoc Safety Task Team

You may not know that such a task team exists, and so a little history. After several incidents of mass violence last year a program was put together called “Government Resources for Houses of Worship and Faith Communities”. Nancy, Sandra Johnson, Peter Keck and Ann Lewis attended the session at Anna Maria on Dec 6, 2017. This was an all-day event with a ton of information and acronyms to decipher! Since it was December we did not have a chance to get back together and decide what to do with this information until the end of January. A couple of weeks ago Nancy, Ann and Peter met – Sandra had left for Florida but did weigh in on our discussion.

We identified 2 major areas of safety for which we felt policies/processes were needed. We also felt the full congregation should be aware of the policy/process. Did you know that there is one in place already? Ann did not, nor what it entails. The Board of Ministries set it up some time ago, and the point people are Ed and Tim, but do not have specifics to share at this time. With all of this in mind we asked about having the Fire Department come to speak to us about fire safety and another professional to help us understand how to react to personal violence issues. Since we are a tenant, and Sandra is on the task team it was noted that this is a WAMS responsibility and they have been looking into a way to bring all of the tenants together for such discussions.

This does not mean we are going to just wait for the meetings, but are going to review the current policy, and update the congregation as appropriate. We want to have a plan in place that would best prepare us for incidents including medical emergencies, intruders, fire or other safety concerns. The meeting being organized by WAMS will probably not occur until after Easter, and since it includes CMHA will most likely be a weekday. That said the task team would like as many people as possible to be in on it, and in on our discussion. There will be a sign-up sheet for people who are interested in this process, so please sign up if you are interested. We will keep you informed and if there is enough interest may hold a session to get all of the questions/concerns out there that the congregation would want addressed.

~ Submitted by Ann Lewis



Dear United Friends,

This month that marks the 30th anniversary year of our congregation's Open and Affirming (ONA) commitment is a time to celebrate being one of the "early birds" in this movement (begun in 1985) and to refresh our commitment to it. It may be hard to remember that in 1988, when United voted to be ONA - publicly welcoming to lesbian, gay and bisexual people - this was a very courageous stance to take! Just a year before that, Donna and I began our ONA ministry with the UCC Coalition for LGBT Concerns so we participated in United's deliberation about making this witness. Little did we know that, two years after the congregation adopted its "Affirmation," we would gratefully become members in the *only* ONA church near us.

In our ongoing "talking the talk" of ONA, United realized the need to include transgender persons in our affirmation and did so in 2013. And we have known from the beginning, that "walking the walk" is equally vital. We have done that through preaching, educational events, LGBT Pride participation, pastoral care, blessing and wedding celebrations, openly LGBT leadership and much more! In all of this, God's desire for love and justice is proclaimed!

The "Open and Affirming" movement for LGBT inclusion and equality is, of course, part of the wider Human Rights movement. Our concern for acceptance based on sexual orientation and gender identity extends to color, age, mental and physical abilities, economic situation and more

But as our pastor, Nancy, reminded us in a recent email, "...battles for inclusion, for dignity, for basic human rights we thought were over are clearly not." Just recently, a Harris Poll survey noted that for the first time in several years, the public's acceptance of LGBT people has decreased. (See "Accelerating Acceptance 2018" at www.glaad.org) That is not the direction that Love would have us go.

So let us rejoice in the power of the Spirit that has called us to be a community of welcome, justice and hope and let our ONA light shine to the glory of God!

Blessings,

Ann & Donna

(Ann B. Day and Donna E. Enberg)