



# United Congregational Church



VOICES Newsletter

February 2019

## Message from the Interim Pastor

Dear Friends,

There is a lovely card ministry here at United Congregational Church every Sunday. Although there are many electronic forms of greeting, holding a card filled with good wishes, gives a material weight to an invisible intention. My dad was an avid letter writer. When the thin airmail letters arrived, edged with red and blue stripes, we would sit at the dining room table and listen to him read the news from our family in Holland. These written connections were the life-line of our familial relationship, as are yours. Card companies commercialize our need for connection on Valentine's Day and other holidays. When I was in elementary school, we decorated shoe boxes with hearts and lacy paper doilies to hold valentines from our classmates. We thought the best ones were store bought. Although parents and teachers encouraged inclusiveness, some mailboxes were filled more than others.

My hunch was that our teachers added a few extras here and there.

Unlike yesteryear, today my preference is handmade cards. There's a little piece of the artist in every card so that the gift includes a bit of the giver.

In this warm-hearted spirit, I invite you to write a letter of gratitude to someone this month. If you can, read the letter to that person so they hear your voice, and mail it afterwards so they can read what you said. It might be a letter to a family member, or a person from your past that believed in you; the teacher who touched your life, the Uncle who took you fishing, or the neighbor who shared a compassionate ear. Give your precious gift of gratitude to someone. It's a beautiful thing to do.

As a community of faith we are God's love letter to the world ! St. Paul's valentine to the Ephesian church is my sentiment for you:

***...I pray that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith,  
as you are being rooted and grounded in love.  
I pray that you may have the power  
to comprehend, with all the saints,  
what is the breath and length and height and depth,  
and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge,  
so that you may be filled with the fullness of God.***

It is my delight to be here at United Congregational Church. I've never heard a pastor more in love with her people as Nancy is with you! You are a warmhearted, generous people, and a joy to serve!

**Blessings,  
Dirkje Legerstee**

P.S. I can't resist sharing Henri Nouwen's words from The Beloved



Dearly Beloved  
I have called you from the very beginning  
You are mine and I am yours  
You are my beloved, on you my favor rests.  
I have molded you in the depths of the heart  
and knitted you together in your Mother's womb.  
I have carved you in the palms of my hands  
and hidden you in the shadow of my embrace.  
I look at you with infinite tenderness  
and care for you with a care more intimate than a mother for her child.  
I have counted every hair on your head and guided you at every step.  
Wherever you go I go with you, and wherever you rest I keep watch.  
I will give your food that will satisfy all your hunger and drink,  
that will quench all your thirst. I will not hide my face from you.  
you know me as your own as I know you as my own.  
You belong to me.  
I am your Father, your Mother,  
your Brother, your Sister, your Lover,  
your Spouse yes, even your Child.  
Wherever you are  
I will be.  
Nothing will ever  
separate us.  
We are  
One.

## ASH WEDNESDAY: MARCH 6<sup>TH</sup>



We begin the holy season of Lent with a simple, contemplative service on Ash Wednesday, **March 6<sup>th</sup>, at 7:00 pm.** The service will include the distribution of ashes, a sign of our repentance and human frailty. Please join us as we begin our journey through Lent together.

## LENTEN PROGRAM MARCH 10, 17 & 31: “LETTER FROM A BIRMINGHAM JAIL”

In April of 1963, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr sat in the wilderness of a jail in Birmingham, Alabama. He had been arrested for leading a march of African Americans -- in the heart of the segregated South -- calling for an Easter boycott of white-owned stores. He did this as an act of faith-inspired civil disobedience. The courts had ordered him not to march. He did not have a permit, but his faith led him to march anyway.

While in jail, eight white moderate clergymen published an article in *The Birmingham News* that was critical of Dr. King, his methods, and the marches he organized. In his own handwriting on scrap pieces of newspaper, Dr. King composed a response to the statement of the white clergy in a writing known as the “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.”

In the social and political wilderness of 2019, Dr. King’s words provide as great and poignant a faith challenge as they did in 1963. And so, our special Lenten program this year will be a three-part study of Dr. King’s “Letter” – March 10, 17, 31 – led by Rev. Nancy Elder-Wilfred, Rev. Sally Norris, and Rev. Wesley Williams; we will gather immediately after church in the Meeting Room for the program; bring a bag lunch if you want!

Here are two websites with the text of the “Letter” so you may begin reading in advance:  
[https://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/documents/Letter\\_Birmingham\\_Jail.pdf](https://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/documents/Letter_Birmingham_Jail.pdf)  
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/02/letter-from-birmingham-jail/552461/>

As part of this program, we are delighted to welcome the Rev. Wesley Williams as our guest preacher on **March 31<sup>st</sup>**. Rev. Williams is a retired United Methodist minister whose ministerial heritage extends back to American slavery. He served United Methodist Churches in New England for thirty-seven years before retiring in 2013. In addition to serving local parishes, he served as the urban minister for the United Methodist denomination, primarily in greater Boston, where his ministry concentrated on improving and supporting education for Latino youth, community policing, and cross-cultural, cross racial relationships between churches, both United Methodist and other denominations.

Lent is the time when we, as those who seek to follow Jesus, mirror the time he spent in the wilderness. This study will enable us to examine many of the assumptions and perspectives which inform our personal and societal wildernesses, so that we may become more urgent and faith-filled advocates for building the “beloved community” which Jesus calls us to do.

## GOD OR GOOGLE: WHERE DO WE GET ANSWERS?



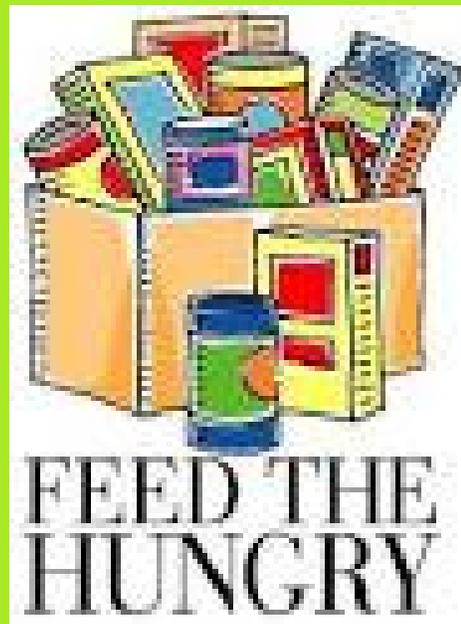
When you have a question – one of those BIG questions that aren't as easy to answer as “...in the top left hand drawer...” or “Thursday, at 7:30” – where you turn for an answer? God? Google? Somewhere else?!

**Our annual retreat this year will be March 23-24** and our theme will be how we deal with the questions we face in life – questions that don't have easy answers and can keep us up at night: who do we turn to, and what happens when we don't seem to get the answer we seek? What do we do when we can't find words for prayer, and is it possible to pray “wrong”? Do our prayers ever go “unanswered” and what do we do when it feels that way to us? Is Google really better at answering our questions than God????

**Our retreat will begin at 11:00 on Saturday March 23<sup>rd</sup>, with lunch, and continue through lunch on Sunday March 24<sup>th</sup>.** We will gather at the Glastonbury Abbey in Hingham, where we have been before and know that we are received with lovely hospitality! **The cost for the retreat is \$100**, and includes 4 meals and overnight accommodations in a single or double room; scholarship aid is available – please speak with Nancy if you would like financial assistance.

We will have time together for quiet and for prayer, for fellowship, good food and laughter – a wonderful way to recharge any “inner batteries” worn down from winter! Registration forms are available on the sign-up table: please fill out one of the forms and put your information and registration check in the envelope beside the sign-up sheet. If God or Google can't answer your retreat questions, please speak to Nancy or a member of the Community and Fellowship Ministry!!

# HELPING OTHERS



During the month of February, members of our congregation have an opportunity to help others in a very direct and doable way. The Carty Cupboard, a ministry supported by our church, is asking for donations of various hygiene items. Many of the people picking up food at Carty often ask for personal items, as they struggle to make ends meet. Especially needed are soaps, shampoos, conditioners, tampons, toothpaste and toothbrushes, and diapers in sizes 1 through 5.

The hygiene items can be left in the collection hamper at the entrance to Merriman Chapel, along with donations of non-perishable food, which are also always welcome. United Congregational Church has long helped Carty serve those in need, and we hope everyone will consider purchasing one or two extra goods to put in the hamper this month. Anyone wanting more information is welcome to contact Tim Camp online at [timbcamp@aol.com](mailto:timbcamp@aol.com), or his home phone at 508- 798- 6997.

With Thanks & Blessings,

**The Missions & Outreach Ministry**

## United Calendar & Prayer Intentions



### **CALENDAR:**

Feb 13 Board of Ministry Meeting  
Feb 25 Carty Food Cupboard ~ Wesley Methodist Church  
Jan 28-Feb 25 Pastor Nancy's Spiritual Sabbatical  
March 23-24 Retreat

### **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, February 3rd: Norma Holmes, Elisabeth, & Darrell Hyder, Peggy Israelian, Pat & Peter Keck. We pray for them to feel the blessing of our prayer as deeply as they feel the loving presence of God.

For Sunday, February 10<sup>h</sup>: Marilyn Kerr, Arline & Fred Kimball, Elise Kreiger, Meri Kruse.

For Sunday, February 17<sup>h</sup>: Audrey White & Aaron LaBranche, Ann Lewis, Sandra Longvall-Johnson.

For Sunday, February 24<sup>th</sup>: David Maciewski & Nicole Belanger, Cooper Belanger, Eddi-Jo Magui, Matilda Evans.

### **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/>)