



United Congregational Church



VOICES Newsletter

January 2016

Message from Serena Leiser



Dear Friends,

When I came to United in September of 2014, I had no idea of the effect this church community would have on me. When I heard United's story and how you gifted the building and a substantial portion of the church's endowment to WAMS, I knew this had to be a special place with a special group of people., but it has surpassed all my expectations. United definitely knows how to "do church". The people of United are welcoming, caring, respectful, humble and have a faith that is beyond strong.

When I came to United I was not exactly sure what type of ministry I was being called to but after serving with all of you and through United learning more about Worcester Fellowship, I now know I am called to a ministry of social justice, especially with people who are without homes and shelter and people who are in recovery from any form of addiction.

After my first year with United I thought maybe this would become my home church, but I now know that I am being called to another place both for my ministry and for personal reasons. So it is with a full but slightly heavy heart I must tell you that February 28th will be my last Sunday at United as I am moving down to Dover, Delaware.

The personal reason is to be near family. As we all know family is not always determined by blood, sometimes it is determined by the heart. My heart has been stolen by a 3 year old little girl who I call my granddaughter. Her parents did me an enormous honor of naming her after me, so she is my little Serena. I have been traveling down to visit them quite often lately and it is so wonderful to be part of a family unit. I have so many dear and wonderful friends in this area, but I am finding that nothing compares with the feel of a child's arms around my neck and a little voice whispering "I love you" in my ear.

When the idea to move first came to me I was very hesitant because I had found such a strong ministry here with United and Worcester Fellowship and I felt that, in a way, I was turning away from what God had been calling me to. Then I attended a service at the UCC church in Dover, and for many reasons I knew that not only was family calling me to move down there, but God was as well.

I cannot begin to tell you all how much my time with United has meant to me. But I will try a little to do this on January 31st when I will be preaching my last sermon before I leave. I will be talking about my journey with United and Worcester Fellowship and what might be next for me. So I hope those who are able will come to worship on the 31st and hear my story.

Blessings to all,

Serena

Lenten Devotional Book and Prayer Gathering



Lent begins this year on February 10, Ash Wednesday. The Spiritual Life and Diaconate Ministry has ordered copies of "*Everything is Grace: Reflections for Lent 2016*", one for each household. "*Everything is Grace*" is published by Pax Christi USA, the Catholic peace and justice organization, and contains with reflections for individual and group use focusing on the daily readings throughout the season. Copies of the booklet will be available at church by early February.

The season of Lent invites us into deeper reflection and prayer ~ to intentionally bring our attention back to our life with God. During Lent, we will offer weekly gatherings on Wednesday evenings, from 7:00 – 8:00 pm. We will use "*Everything is Grace*" as the basis for our prayer and conversation. There may also be gatherings after church for those who can't come to the evening gatherings. **Please note that on Wednesday February 24th, the prayer gathering will be from 6:00 – 7:00 as the Board of Ministries meets that evening at 7!!**

Ash Wednesday Service



We begin the holy season of Lent with a simple, contemplative service on Ash Wednesday, February 10th, 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 journey through Lent together.



Spirit, Story, Spark!!

On January 10th we held our first in a series of United community events in which we have an opportunity to reflect on our journey as a congregation, celebrate the gifts with which we have been blessed and consider what we want our future together to be.

During our first event we met in small groups to eat delicious soups provided by the Community and Fellowship Ministry (Thank You!!) and we talked about three questions. Here are some of the responses. We want to have as much participation as possible so anyone who was not able to attend on the 10th should pick up a packet of colored cards on "Walter's Table". We will be collating all the responses to share before our next event in February.

How I first came to United.

- We tried a few different churches. United had the warmest, kindest welcome, the most lovely members and the warmest worship atmosphere.
- Twenty years ago I came looking for a church that would accept my gay son and found my church family. The love I feel at United is more than I can ever describe.
- We were looking for a church home and visited a number of area churches. None of them really felt like a good fit except United. We felt more welcome here than anywhere else .

Why did you stay at United.

- I stayed for the kind and genuine members, the fellowship time and how much the church focuses on service and world issues.
- I came back because of the friendliness of the welcome and the open liberal orientation I loved the retreat, woman's book group and felt "at home" and the church is close to my home. I am pleased that our energy does not have to focus on the building and can focus on mission, service and helping others.
- I saw the good our church did even for those outside our congregation (food cupboard, IHN hosting of families, special mission offerings etc.

One memory or story about United you would like told.

- The Shepherd Knapp Christmas Pageant was always a highlight of the Advent season.
- I was baptized and had my wedding blessing ceremony here at United. I feel incredibly welcome here with my wife United is the best part of my move to MA.
- Gifting the building and endowment
- When we became open and affirming

Stay tuned for more responses from the congregation, and plan to join the next "Spirit, Story, Spark" gathering after church on February 7th!

Board of Ministries



VOLUNTEERING AT THE FOOD CUPBOARD

For the past several years, members of our congregation have been volunteering at the Carty Food Cupboard. The Cupboard is located at Wesley Methodist Church, just a couple of blocks away from United, and serves many in the downtown Worcester area. Over the past decade, for example, the number of individuals and families who are helped by Carty each month has increased from about 80 to over 400! Carty is open several mornings each week, and many clients receive assistance then. These hours are not feasible however for some who depend on the food, especially those who have day jobs. Therefore, Carty also is open a couple of Monday evenings each month, one of which is filled by United Congregational Church members (graduate students from Worcester State University do the other). United's shift runs from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. the second or third Monday of each month (the date is always

listed in that month's issue of Voices). Volunteers perform a variety of tasks, including greeting people, logging them into the computer records, and packing/handing out bags of groceries. Our church's team consists of members who have volunteered here for years, as well as members who are there for the first time.

The Carty Food Cupboard has been a very rewarding ministry for United. Everyone participating has remarked on how volunteering there has helped United members become better acquainted with each other, and we have also gotten to know (and become quite fond of) many of the people we serve. It has also been a wonderful opportunity for our church to help others! We hope everyone will consider becoming part of our Carty team, and encourage anyone interested to contact Tim Camp (timbamp@aol.com; 508-798-6997) for more details.

Blessings,

United's Missions & Outreach Ministry

Calendar - United and the Central MA UCC

January 24 – Community & Fellowship Meeting
January 26 – Book Club Meeting
January 27 – Board of Ministries Meeting
February 8 - Carty Food Cupboard
February 14 – Spiritual Life & Diaconate
February 14 – TPC Meeting
February 17 - Wednesday Lenten Prayer Gathering
February 24 - 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

Building a Platform to Support UCC Future Mission

The UCC's ninth general minister and president has been in office for a little more than 100 days, laying the groundwork for what the Rev. John C. Dorhauer sees as the support platform for the future mission of the denomination.

"The Holy Spirit envisions a future in which the United Church of Christ matters and I've been challenging the leaders of this denomination, from the full width and breadth of our geography, to change our outlook and stop worrying about our diminishment and start celebrating what the Holy Spirit has in store for us. Our better days, our best days, are still ahead of us."

One of the things he's been doing is assembling the foundation for the UCC's future growth.

Four strategic hires, and the progression of five national initiatives — a Still Speaking 2.0 marketing campaign which will soon be available to all the churches, daily phone calls from the Cleveland office to local churches to deepen the connection between the national setting and the local congregation, a survey seeking the insights of those under 40 to plot the future, a white privilege curriculum that is being written for release later this year, and 12 monthly multimedia campaigns around issues central to the UCC mission — initiatives that kick off next week, the first with the Rev. Traci Blackmon, new executive minister of Justice and Witness Ministries.

Dorhauer, who is still "thrilled at having been called as general minister and president," says the relentless pace of the position is his greatest challenge.

"I can remember a conversation with John Thomas, prior to being elected — him saying 'John, you think at some point you're going to adjust to the pace. You won't.' And he's right," Dorhauer said. "It's exhausting, and I move from one big thing to another."

That pace doesn't look to be letting up. In fact Dorhauer is currently involved in his next big thing, working with his new strategic officer, Cheryl Joseph Williams, to plan his April installation as general minister and president.
