



United Congregational Church



VOICES Newsletter

January 2018

Message from the Pastor



Dear friends,

It seems a long time ago ~ it was, after all, last year ~ but as we end the holiday season (beginning with Thanksgiving and ending with Epiphany, with Advent and Christmas filling the weeks between) I want to bring us back to Thanksgiving Sunday, when we not only filled our bellies with a Thanksgiving feast, but also filled the front of the church with food for people in Puerto Rico. Celsa Ayala-Coloma and Cesar Coloma have a farm in the mountains of Puerto Rico, and Cesar has been there since the hurricane hit last fall; he was home in Worcester briefly, and returned to help rebuild his community.

We gathered enough food to fill 13 boxes of food, which arrived in Puerto Rico five days later. Cesar distributed the food through his community – to senior centers, school, neighbors ~ wherever he knew it was needed. What a gift it was for Cesar's community, to receive much needed food in a region so hard hit by the hurricane; what a gift it was for us to connect with our sisters and brothers, giving not just food but also the assurance they are not forgotten.



As we move into this new year, I give thanks for the blessings we received in such abundance in the past year. I pray that we carry with us into this year gratitude for our blessings, compassion for one another, patience and kindness (even when both are sorely tested!) and wisdom to recognize what is "of God" and what is not.

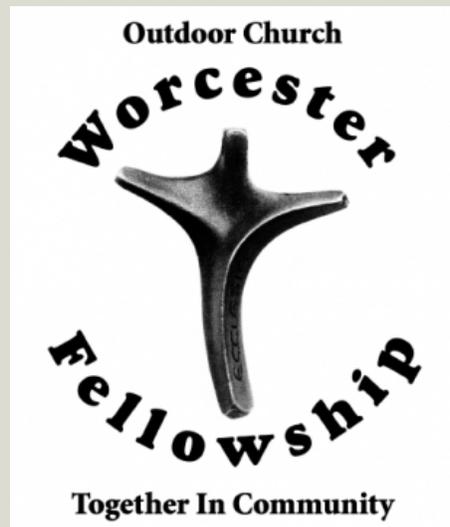
Howard Thurman, the African-American theologian and civil rights leader, wrote the following words, which I offer as our calling in the year to come:

The Work of Christmas

*When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and the princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among all,
To make music in the heart.*

New Year Blessings,

Nancy



*I am pleased to announce that Worcester Fellowship's Pastor Noelle Dattilo has graciously agreed to preach at United on Sunday, January 28th. In support of her ministry, our confirmation teens will be collecting socks for the unhoused people of Worcester on January **14th, 21st, and 28th**.*

We are in need of thick, warm, black or white crew socks for men and women!

After worship on January 26th the Confirmation teens, along with a few adults from United, will be attending worship at Worcester Fellowship with me and Pastor Noelle. While there we will help to serve lunch and distribute the socks that have been collected. Please e-mail me at debbieduva@aol.com if you would like to join us that day!

Blessings and thanks,

Debbie



ASH WEDNESDAY: FEBRUARY 14TH

We begin the holy season of Lent with a simple, contemplative service on Ash Wednesday, February 14th, at 7:00 pm (Valentine's Day!). 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.



REV. BOB BACHELDER RETIRING

Bob Bachelder has been the “face of WAMS” for many years, and we at United, as well as other churches in the Conference, have been blessed by our partnership with him. The following letter is the announcement of his retirement:

After leading Worcester Area Mission Society (WAMS), UCC for more than 30 years, Rev. Bob

Bachelder will retire from his role as Minister and President on August 31, 2018. During this time, Rev. Bachelder has been a leader in innovative community ministry in the Worcester area. Under his leadership WAMS helped organize the first Habitat for Humanity project in Massachusetts in 1985, the first housing program for persons with AIDS, and also pioneered a unique church-community partnership to raise investment capital for affordable housing and neighborhood revitalization. WAMS was the first organization in the country to be recognized by the National Council of Churches for best practice public ministry.

In 2018, WAMS continues to be a valued community partner in the areas of affordable housing, homelessness prevention and urban education with its Sustainable Massachusetts conferences, "Reach Out Worcester" hands-on learning experience for youth, and CUBS (Comprehension and Understanding Brings Success) summer enrichment program with Worcester Public Schools.

The WAMS Board of Directors will soon open a search process to identify a new leader to succeed Rev. Bachelder.

Rev. Rick Whitefleet-Smith Chair, WAMS Board of Directors



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...we're still "scouting" a semi-permanent home for our Pub Theology, so the location might change; check the church website, Sunday bulletins and google group emails to confirm the place for our gathering on February 7.*

United Calendar



- Jan 29 Carty Food Cupboard ~ 5:30 pm (Wesley Methodist Church)
- Feb 7 Pub Theology ~ 7:00 pm at Sahara (143 Highland St, Worcester)
- Feb 11 Spiritual Life and Diaconate Ministry Meeting
- Feb 21 Board of Ministry Meeting

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/>)
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Nebraska church reaches out to immigrants with welcome, education, resources

January 10, 2018

Written by Connie Larkman

A UCC congregation in small-town Nebraska is partnering with other justice organizations to do something tangible to help immigrants and refugees who face losing their Temporary Protected Status in the United States.

United Church of Christ, First Congregational in Crete reached out to offer assistance on Tuesday, Jan. 9 in the form of two clinics on the issue. Crete, Neb., home to about 7,000 people, has a significant immigrant population and First Congregational is immersed in offering their neighbors from other countries extravagant welcome in a number of different ways.

"We, in the church, are really just a hospitable and safe place to talk about relevant and authentic concerns and celebrate any progress in being a better community," said the Rev. Jeff Hagaman, pastor of First Congregational. "We do very little more than be welcoming. We don't feel the need to control any agenda, just be an open place that welcomes the opportunity to help better our sense of community."

Right now in their community, immigration issues are top of mind. Crete has a large Guatemalan presence, with Mayan and Spanish speaking people. All Central American countries are represented, as are Myanmar, Cuba and Vietnam. There are 14 different languages spoken in the Crete public schools.

President Donald Trump is currently **cutting back on the number of immigrants granted Temporary Protected Status**, which allows them to live and work legally in the U.S. TPS is a form of humanitarian relief that protects from deportation people who would face hardship or danger if they were forced to return to homelands devastated by armed conflict and natural disasters. This week the administration put 200,000 Salvadorans on notice that their TPS status will end, adding El Salvador to a growing list that includes immigrants from Haiti, Sudan and Nicaragua. Later this year, the government will decide whether to extend TPS for five other nations: Syria, Nepal, Honduras, Yemen and Somalia.

"Last spring, when we hosted an 'Immigration 101' seminar, we had two sessions and a total of 250 people attended," said Hagaman. "That was not what we expected!"

The church, looking to become more culturally diverse, is reaching out to its neighbors in a number of ways. In a partnership with the Crete Public Schools, it offers English as a Second Language classes Monday through Friday mornings, providing space and childcare for parents who need to learn. First Congregational also hosts events and weddings for a local Spanish speaking church when their building isn't big enough, and works with the food bank to assist families in need.

"We send a group from our area to Guatemala to build houses through Constru Casa because we want to help living conditions there, but more importantly to us, to understand who our new neighbors are in Crete by knowing a bit about where they come from," Hagaman said.

Once a month, the congregation hosts what it calls a welcoming committee.

"A group of people working in the community gathers to discuss how we be a better community," he continued. "Nebraska Appleseed and Justice for Our Neighbors, and the Center for Rural Affairs are statewide organizations that meet with us. The local police, library, hospital, Doane University, Crete Public Schools, and several social agencies meet to talk about issues in town and ways to work together. This is how we were able to be ready to offer the TPS workshop at the right time. This meeting is chaired by a city employee whose job it is to help newcomers find resources."

The newcomers are drawn to the community by a number of good jobs and a small-town lifestyle in mid-America. Three big businesses, a Farmland Foods packing plant, a Bunge grain mill and Purina Dog/Cat food teaching factory, are bringing in people from all over the world. First Congregational's mission is all about being ready to welcome them.

"Our church is a very safe spot," Hageman said. "People know they can come here. Our biggest resource is a smile. All ministry is local. Our local ministry just happens to be global."
