



United Congregational Church



VOICES Newsletter

January 2019



Message from the Pastor

"Cynics seek darkness wherever they go. They point always to approaching dangers, impure motives, and hidden schemes. They sneer at enthusiasm, ridicule spiritual fervor, and despise charismatic behavior.

People who have come to know the joy of God do not deny the darkness, but they choose not to live in it. They claim that the light that shines in the darkness can be trusted more than the darkness itself and that a little bit of light can dispel a lot of darkness. They point each other to flashes of light here and there, and remind each other that they reveal the hidden but real presence of God."

-Henri J.M. Nouwen, Return of the Prodigal Son

Friends,

We are in the season of Light: Epiphany, the time we celebrate the light that led the three kings to the baby Jesus – the light that revealed the Holy Light that came into our world with his birth.

We often gloss over the darker stories surrounding Jesus' birth: King Herod's slaughter of all baby boys under the age of two – his furious attempt to kill the child he feared was the promised Messiah; Mary and Joseph's desperate flight into Egypt with their newborn son, after an angel warned them of Herod's plan...

There was darkness then, as there is darkness now, and so we look ever more hopefully for glimpses of light to reveal the grace-full truth that God is here.

As I write this, I am overwhelmed with two thoughts: first, that my hopes and prayers for our country's leadership and administration to find ways to work together and embody the greatest values of our country seem to be unheard. Second, how much Mary and Joseph's flight into Egypt mirrors the desperate flight of so many families from South America to our borders.

Like the stories in Matthew's Gospel of the Slaughter of the Innocents and of the Flight into

Egypt, my thoughts have their basis in fear:

Herod feared a king had been born who was greater than he, just as rulers and those in authority today make decisions based on their fear of losing power. Mary and Joseph feared that their newborn son would be killed, just as families flee to our borders today because of fear of violence or starvation or death at the hands of gangs.

Fear is a powerful motivator. Fear creates darkness and feeds on darkness. Fear blinds us to God's presence and to the light of grace and life and love. Darkness and fear are real – and much though I pray for them to be overcome by light and love, I suspect human nature means there will always be people who choose power and fear, greed and anger....but, as I have said before – and will say again and again and again (!) and as Nouwen says better than I could,

“People who have come to know the joy of God do not deny the darkness, but they choose not to live in it.”

I realize we are well into January by the time you get this – but it is never too late to make a resolution for the new year (or for what remains of it!), and so I offer this as a resolution for the year unfolding before us: to not deny the darkness in our world – the fear, the abuse of power, the violence of word and deed – but to choose to live in Light: to shine light by proclaiming and living peace and justice, and by claiming and celebrating the promise that we – even we – reveal the presence and grace of God!

Blessings in this year to come ~

Nancy

SABBATICAL NOTE FROM NANCY

As you will read elsewhere in this newsletter, I will be on a “mini-sabbatical” from January 28th – February 25th. I plan to spend the time catching up on reading some of the books that have been piling up beside my desk, connecting with some other spiritual directors/retreat leaders, and being on an 8 day directed retreat at the Mercy Center (run by the Sisters of Mercy, on the Connecticut shore). I have been to the Mercy Center twice before for directed retreats, and find that this extended time of silence, broken only by a brief daily meeting with a spiritual director, brings me back to God in unexpected ways – pure gift! I am more grateful than I can say for this much-needed time to re-charge, and grateful that while I am away, my colleague **Dirkje Legerstee** will be providing pastoral coverage. I have known Dirkje for many years, and know you will be in good and faithful hands under her leadership. You can learn more about her in the letter she has written and included in this issue of Voices. I offer my thanks in advance to those who will be taking on extra responsibilities while I am gone, especially those on the Spiritual Life and Diaconate Ministry, who will be helping Dirkje be aware of pastoral needs. I will return to the church on Tuesday February 26th – and grateful that I will be for the time away, know I will be glad to return!

P.S. “Reminder: Please wear your name tags! It helps visitors and guests know who you are!”



In Appreciation

Many thanks to all who made our Advent and Christmas season so very special: to all who contributed poinsettias to decorate the church, and all who delivered them to our less mobile members; to **Andy and Carolyn Dzaugis** and **Ann Lewis** for putting up the trees (successfully, in spite of Nancy's "help"); to **Elisabeth Hyder** for helping us make Christmas stars; to everyone who helped "undecorate" Merriman Chapel so we could decorate the Gallery/Sanctuary; to all who brought the Christmas story to light in the "Pick-up Pageant"; to **musicians** and **ushers** and **greeters** and **bakers** and **candle-lighters** and **worship leaders** and especially to **Ed Bourgault**, who took care of all the behind-the-scenes details, and to **Karen Brough**, who printed extra bulletins and arranged for other details of the season! Many thanks, also, to all who contributed to the mitten tree ~ bringing hats, gloves, and scarves which will be gratefully received by the guests of Worcester Fellowship.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS FOR OUR SPRING RETREAT!!



The Community and Fellowship Ministry is making plans for us to return to the Glastonbury Abbey in Hingham for an overnight retreat, **Saturday March 23rd – Sunday March 24th**! The theme for the retreat is still under consideration, but we can promise time for fellowship and laughter, quiet and prayer, good food and recharging any "inner batteries" worn down from the winter! Cost is \$100 per person, which includes 4 meals and overnight accommodations in a single or double room; scholarship aid is available – please speak to Nancy if you would like financial assistance. More information and an opportunity to sign up will be available nearer the end of February, but now is the time to mark the dates on your new 2019 calendar.

CHURCH MODERATOR'S NOTES



United Congregational Church's Pastor, the Reverend Nancy Elder-Wilfrid, will begin a month long Spiritual Sabbatical on January 28th. Pastoral duties will be covered during Nancy's sabbatical by the Reverend Dirkje Legerstee, who will be assisted by our Spiritual Life & Diaconate Ministry.

When the Pastoral Relations Committee approached United's Board of Ministries seeking approval for the sabbatical, there wasn't any hesitation among Board members over approving it. It is customary for church pastors to receive a sabbatical every seven years; Nancy has served almost eight at United Congregational Church!

Most importantly however, we all realized just how much Pastor Nancy has given our church. She has not only been a tremendous spiritual mentor, but also a very caring disciple who has comforted and supported many of us during our personally difficult times.

Now it is Nancy's turn to have time to study, pray and reflect, so she might be spiritually recharged. The Board of Ministries, along with our congregation, wish our Pastor well during her sabbatical, and will keep her in our prayers!

Anyone having questions or concerns should feel free to contact me by e-mail (timbcamp@aol.com), or my home phone (508- 798- 6997).

With peace and blessings,

Tim Camp
U.C.C. Moderator

MESSAGE FROM REV. DR. DIRKJE F. LEGERSTEE

Dear Friends of United Congregational Church,

Although we have never met there is a kinship available to us as brothers and sisters in Christ. It is an honor to serve as your Sabbatical Interim as a time to pause, and savor the goodness of your beloved community. I am looking forward to meeting you, and to hearing your stories. As Rev. takes her well-earned time away you might consider taking up a practice of rejuvenation for your own spirit.

Renewal can be framed as movement toward God in body, mind and spirit, like a pilgrimage. The Latin root of the word "pilgrimage", *peregrine* means "strange" or "stranger". The pilgrim intentionally becomes a stranger in the service of transformation: to see with different eyes; to listen more deeply; to taste and to touch; to sing and to move in ways one might not have experienced before. We don't have to travel far to put on the lenses of a beginners mind. The intention is to grow closer to God, to be open to the sacred, to be changed by encounters, both positive and negative that can offer the blessing of learning and growth.

As we journey together in the coming weeks I invite you to experience InterPlay as a way of attuning your perception. InterPlay uses simple movement and story, sounding or singing to create fun, connection, community, and renewal. Over the years of my ministry I have taught interplay to dozens of ministers and churches, seminary students and a diversity of folk of all ages in many settings including Star Island. InterPlay is a spiritual practice that nurtures my soul. A play-filled heart is fully present. So come and play no special skills are needed. "The playful heart evokes spontaneity, wonder, curiosity, openness, depth of engagement, passion, refined concentration, beauty, and unconditional regard."

May you be blessed with surprising encounters in this time to pause and refresh we walk and move together during this sabbatical.

With you on the way,

Dirkje

Rev. Dr. Dirkje F. Legerstee

Come and open your heart with InterPlay!

11:30-1:30pm. On Sabbatical Sundays following worship and coffee hour. Bring a bag lunch. If you know you are coming let the office know so I have a sense of the space we might need if we are 50 or more it will be fun! Go to InterPlay.org for more information.



InterPlay
unlock the wisdom of your body

United Calendar & Prayer Intentions



CALENDAR:

- Jan 16 Board of Ministry Meeting
Jan 20 MLK Jr. Day
Jan 28 Pastor Nancy's Spiritual Sabbatical
Jan 28 Carty Food Cupboard ~ Wesley Methodist Church

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, January 20th: Ruby Nazir, Arthur Gill, Karry & Harry Gill, Dorista & John Goldsberry, Cherie Grant & Steve Pietrowicz. We pray for them to feel the blessing of our prayer as deeply as they feel the loving presence of God.

For Sunday, January 27th: Stacy Heath, Amy Hennig, Angelina Johnson, Nick Johnson, Joy Hennig & Gloria Beaudry.

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/>)