



United Congregational Church



VOICES Newsletter

March 2017

Message from the Pastor



Dear friends –

We are mid-way through this holy season of Lent ~ a time of prayer, of reflection, of intentionally turning our hearts toward God....I recently came across this prayer by John Chrysostom, the archbishop of Constantinople in the 300's. I offer it to you now as a prayer for this time. (It is never too late to begin a Lenten practice!)

*Do you fast? Give me proof of it by your works.
If you see a poor man, take pity on him.
If you see a friend being honoured, do not envy her.*

*Do not let only your mouth fast,
but also the eye and the ear and the feet and the hands
and all the members of our bodies.*

*Let the hands fast, by being free of avarice.
Let the feet fast, by ceasing to run after sin.
Let the eyes fast, by disciplining them not to glare
at that which is sinful.
Let the ear fast, by not listening to evil talk and gossip.
Let the mouth fast from foul words and unjust criticism.*

*For what good is it if we abstain from birds and fishes,
but bite and devour our brothers and sisters?*

*May He who came to the world to save sinners,
strengthen us to complete the fast with humility,
have mercy on us and save us.
Amen.*

Blessings to you during these days of Lent.

Nancy



ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING

It is easy to feel helpless in the face of so much need in our world. We hear daily of refugees desperately needing the most basic things: food, water, shelter; victims of natural disasters suddenly homeless; communities without clean water; children without access to education...the list goes on and on and on.

Through **One Great Hour of Sharing**, we carry God's message of love and hope to people in crisis. Seven Christian denominations - *American Baptist Church, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Church of the Brethren, Cumberland Presbyterian Church, Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Church of Christ, and Church World Service* work together to support the ministries of **OGHS**.

Your gift to **OGHS** supports international development initiatives, including annual support for missionaries. Currently there are 4 OGHS supported missionaries and 2 Global Mission Interns working in disaster relief, health care, education, sustainable agricultural development, and refugee support. The offering also funds disaster preparedness and response, and disaster related volunteer initiatives in the U.S.

Our OGHS offering will be received on March 26th. Please prayerfully consider how you can be the hands and heart of Jesus for our sisters and brothers through this offering.



HOLY WEEK SERVICES:

Sunday April 9 is Palm Sunday; we gather for worship in Merriman Chapel to at the beginning of Holy Week.

Thursday April 13th at 7:00 in Merriman Chapel is the quiet, contemplative, candle-lit service for **Maundy Thursday**.

Friday April 14th at noon in Merriman Chapel is the solemn **Good Friday** service.

Easter Sunday on April 16th will be celebrated on 10:30 in the Sarah Wyman Whitman Gallery (the former sanctuary) with music of trumpet and organ.

...looking ahead:

On April 30th, the Mission and Outreach Ministry is planning a special program after church with Asima Silva as our guest speaker. Asima is a leader in Worcester's Muslim community and active in local politics. She is a co-founder of EnjoinGood.org, which is "dedicated to building bridges so we can dispel the fear and hate that leads to violence." Asima is active in interfaith conversations and actions toward building understanding and shared advocacy within the greater Worcester community. Asima will talk about the experience of being a Muslim in America. More information to follow closer to April 30th, but please put this date on your calendar!



APRIL 2 ~ THE REVEREND KELLY GALLAGHER, GUEST PREACHER

On April 2nd, our Associate Conference Minister Kelly Gallagher will be our guest preacher. We are blessed to have Kelly supporting our congregations and pastors, and delighted to welcome her to United on April 2nd! Please join us for worship that day!



EASTER FLOWERS

I know – it seems WAY too early to begin thinking about Easter flowers given in memory or honor of loved ones!! However – please note that the deadline for orders for Easter flowers will be April 2nd. An order form will be in the bulletins on March 26th and April 2nd, or you can call the church office to order flowers; cost for Easter flowers will be \$15. Please order your Easter flowers by calling the church office or handing in the order forms as soon as possible to ease placing the flower order!





SPRING AT HEIFER FARM HAS SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE!

PANCAKES AT THE FARM | March 4, 5, 11, & 12 | 8:30 am—1:00 pm

[Join us for our annual pancake breakfast!](#) The meal includes pancakes covered in Heifer Farm maple syrup with a side of farm-raised pork sausage, coffee and juice. After breakfast, tour the farm to view the maple sugaring operation and meet the newborn lambs! Reservations are recommended.

Admission: \$14 per adult, \$7 per child (ages 3-10), free for children 2 and under

Reservations: Call 508-886-2221 or email heifer.farm@heifer.org

WOMEN'S LAMBING | April 3-6 and April 7-10

This is a 3-night immersion experience for women to learn about Heifer's work and experience farm life. The births of sheep and goats, workshops, yoga with goats, and delicious farm-to-table meals make this a truly unforgettable experience.

Cost: \$425 (includes meals and lodging) | Minimum age: 14

YOGA WITH GOATS | March 31, April 4, & 8 from 7:00-8:30 pm

April 22 & May 13 from 10:00-11:30 am & 12:00-1:30 pm

At this yoga class designed for all levels you will be surrounded by our loveable goats! The class includes breathing techniques, yoga postures and guided meditation to ground yourself and connect to Mother Nature.

Cost: \$20 per class | Minimum age: 12 | Childcare available April 22 & May 13 | No pre-registration required

NEW FARM CAFÉ AND EXPANDED GIFT SHOP | Opening March 1 | 9:00 am—5:00 pm

Stop by our gift shop for Heifer Farm's meat and produce along with food and drinks, and fair trade items from around the world. Hot, farm-fresh soup available daily!

FAITH COMMUNITY RESOURCES

We greatly appreciate your support of Heifer! Click [here](#) for updated Faith Community resources including new Faith Lessons, Fill the Ark – a perfect program for the Lenten season – and much more. Contact your local Community Engagement staff at Heifer.Farm@heifer.org to assist in planning a Heifer fundraiser.



MARCH 26TH: GUEST SPEAKER FROM ASCENTRIA

On March 26th, Beth Singley will speak to us after church about the refugee resettlement work being done by Ascentria Care Alliance, the largest resettlement organization in New England. Beth is the Resource Developer for Services for New Americans and has been working closely with congregations who are currently helping refugees or are interested in learning more about offering this support. Please plan to stay for her presentation!



United Calendar

- March 27 Carty Cupboard Volunteer Monday /Wesley United Methodist Church
- April 9 Spiritual Life and Diaconate Ministry meeting
- April 9 Holy Week ~ Palm Sunday ~
- April 13 Maundy Thursday candle-lit evening service
- April 14 Good Friday Service ~noon~
- April 16 Easter Sunday in SWW Gallery (former sanctuary)
- April 24 Carty Cupboard Volunteer Monday/Wesley United 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/>)

God is still speaking,
**UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**



Commentary: Let No One Pull You So Low

March 03, 2017

Written by Bentley de Bardelaben

"Anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them." – 1John2:11 NIV

Whether a story is about the misuse of Native American tribal lands in North Dakota, Jewish American cemeteries being desecrated in Missouri, Indian men shot in Texas, or officers attacked for attempting to corral crowds who are picketing anywhere in our nation, reports like these slowly erode my spirit.

Have the lessons of my childhood about sharing and being kind, that many if not all of us were taught by our elders, evaporated? Generosity of heart, not scarcity, was a cultural mantra of those times. People took care of one another, some even dared to cross racial, religious, and ethnic lines. Communities mattered. Has "fear of the stranger" destroyed this important human concept?

According to a recent report by the Southern Poverty Law Center there were 917 active hate groups in 2016. This is an increase from 784 active groups in 2014. Included in that elevated number are 130 factions of the KKK, 197 black separatists, and 52 anti-LGBTQ groups. Sadly, Anti-Muslim groups grew most dramatically rising from 34 in 2015 to 101 in 2016. That's 197 percent! The SPLC defines a hate group as an organization that engages "beliefs or practices that attack or malign an entire class of people, typically for their immutable characteristics."

In a 1956 essay titled, "Paul's Letter to American Christians", Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. penned these prophetic words, which still ring with truths in our current American context: "May I say just a word to those of you who are struggling against this evil (of injustice). Always be sure that you struggle with Christian methods and Christian weapons. Never succumb to the temptation of becoming bitter. As you press on for justice, be sure to move with dignity and discipline, using only the weapon of love. **Let no man pull you so low as to hate him.** Always avoid violence. If you succumb to the temptation of using violence in your struggle, unborn generations will be the recipients of a long and desolate night of bitterness, and your chief legacy to the future will be an endless reign of meaningless chaos."

Wow! The more things change, the more things stay the same. While some of us struggle to adjust to a constant stream of bedlam dispensed from a newly forming federal administration, let us, Christians and non-Christians alike, try to remember King's admonition.

The one constant we can all expect to encounter in life is change. Although we may not like it, resisting it is futile. Responding to it in ways that injure innocents simply because we fear their difference only creates additional layers of chaos that further lead us down a dark path separating us from the light of the Creator. Let us try to embrace and learn from the gifts that change presents. We may find that it is less traumatic. Then we can begin to usher in the world we truly want and rightfully deserve.

Bentley de Bardelaben is Executive for Administration and Communications of the United Church of Christ.
