



United Congregational Church



VOICES Newsletter

May 2015

Message from the Pastor



Dear friends,

A recent visitor to United told me how much he appreciated our worship service, and how moved he was during the service. *"You seemed so **sincere!**"* he said. Now, I've had people tell me many things after worship, but never that I seemed *sincere!*

I know something of our visitor's history with churches, and so I understood why *sincerity* on the part of the worship leader was so important....and I appreciated what he said – truly, one of my prayers is always that my presence in worship is **authentically** grounded in and reflecting my faith and my sense of God's presence.

I was reminded of his comment when I read a recent article in the Washington Post, *"Want millennials back in the pews? Stop trying to make church 'cool.'" (April 30, by Rachel Held Evans)* The article begins,

Bass reverberates through the auditorium floor as a heavily bearded worship leader pauses to invite the congregation, bathed in the light of two giant screens, to tweet using #JesusLives. The scent of freshly brewed coffee wafts in from the lobby, where you can order macchiatos and purchase mugs boasting a slick church logo. The chairs are comfortable, and the music sounds like something from the top of the charts. At the end of the service, someone will win an iPad.

This, in the view of many churches, is what millennials like me want.

...this is not what United is – not by a long shot – and I, for one, am glad. We aren't about "show"; we don't try to create a "mood"; we don't work to impress people with fancy technology (although a fail-proof sound system would be nice!). Rather, we try to embody the loving Word of God in our actions and in our worship....and as long as our spirit of welcome during fellowship hour is genuine, our mismatched mugs work just fine!

Two other "millennial" quotes from the article:

"...I want a service that is not sensational, flashy, or particularly 'relevant'. I can be entertained anywhere. At church, I do not want to be entertained. I do not want to be the target of anyone's marketing. I want to be asked to participate in the life of an ancient-future community."

"When a church tells me how I should feel ('Clap if you're excited about Jesus!') it smacks of inauthenticity. Sometimes I don't feel like clapping. Sometimes I need to worship in the midst of my brokenness and confusion – not in spite of it and certainly not in denial of it."

There it is again – the longing for sincerity and authenticity, and the reminder of what people look for in a

church: a community where we can connect to something more than ourselves (as the UCC communion liturgy reminds us, we are “...joined with the saints of all times and places”), where we can touch into the power of tradition, be challenged to consider how we live our faith today, be fed and cared for on this piece of our journey and be invited to be part of a church whose story is still unfolding.

How are we doing? I don't think we're trying to pretend to be something we're not in hope of attracting millennials (or any other age group for that matter!) – what do you think? Clearly, we want people who are searching for a community of faith to visit United, and we hope that when they come, they will experience the vibrant presence of God. Clearly, we hope they'll come back and bring their questions, commitments and sense of God with them!

I don't think we at United have “arrived” – we are still very much learning how we can be the Body of Christ in this particular time and place. We are always discerning what traditions to hold onto and what to let go of; we are part of a larger faith community that believes “*God is still speaking*” and it isn't always easy to figure out when it is God's voice we are hearing – and when it is our own desires or fears.

I've been thinking a lot about authenticity, and how our worship and our presence beyond our doors can *authentically* witness to our faith. What do people experience when they visit United? What do *you* experience here – you who are long time members, and you who have come here more recently? What feels genuine to you, and where do we need to pay attention to what we are conveying about who we are as individuals and as a community ~ and about God?

One more quote from the article, reminding us what is so wonderful and unique about the church:

You can get a cup of coffee with your friends anywhere, but church is the only place you can get ashes smudged on your forehead as a reminder of your mortality. You can be dazzled by a light show at a concert on any given weekend, but church is the only place that fills a sanctuary with candlelight and hymns on Christmas Eve. You can snag all sorts of free swag for brand loyalty online, but church is the only place where you are named a beloved child of God with a cold plunge in the water. You can share food with the hungry at any homeless shelter, but only the church teaches that a shared meal brings us into the very presence of God.

Blessings,
Nancy

Evening Program: “*Seizing the Nonviolent Moments*”, May 19th, 7:00 – 9:00 in Merriman Chapel



All are invited to an special evening program with Nancy Small as she shares from her new book, “*Seizing the Nonviolent Moments: Reflections on the Spirituality of Nonviolence Through the Lens of Scripture*”. She will lead a discussion on ways we can all practice nonviolence in our lives, drawing upon examples from scripture and the lives of contemporary peacemakers.

Nancy is a hospice chaplain, spiritual director, and seeker of peace. She is a former national coordinator and current Ambassador of Peace with Pax Christi USA, the national Catholic peace movement.

For more information, please speak to Dave DuBois or Nancy Elder-Wilfrid. This event is free and open to the public; copies of Nancy Small's book will be available for purchase at the event.

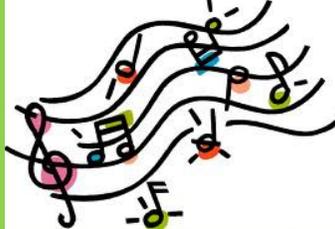
The flyer is attached.

Pentecost Sunday: May 24th!



On Pentecost we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit ~ an event seen as the "birthday of the church" and a joyous celebration of the on-going power of the God in our lives. Red is traditionally the color of the Spirit, and so to get into the full spirit of Pentecost: wear red to church that Sunday!

June 14th: Hymn Sing with the Jolly Beggars!!



The Jolly Beggars will join us once again for worship on June 14th, as we have a special hymn sing service – you choose the hymns, the Beggars will figure out the music! We'd like to include your favorite readings, poems and devotional stories as part of the service...if you have something you would like to include, please speak to Nancy!

Welcome to....



Olive Flynn Eakin, born to Mary Flynn and Jim Eakin on April 15th! We celebrate with them and ask God's blessings upon their new family!

...and looking ahead to July:



All are invited to share the joy as Karen Wilfrid and John Pelletier are married in the sanctuary at United on Saturday July 11th, at 3:30. More details as the date draws closer, but Karen and John hope you will join them for the wedding ceremony and simple reception immediately following in the Public Room.

Central Association Annual Meeting Sunday May 3 First Congregational Church, Sutton

No long business meeting! No dry, boring reports! This was a new style annual meeting. Yes, we did pass a budget and approve reports printed in our handout but it took less than half an hour. Then we moved on to a "mini" Super Saturday with our choice of 8 different 50 minute workshops.

Worship was outstanding. Wonderful music by the choir with organ and piano. Engaging Biblical story telling and memorable, inspiring preaching by Rev. Cynthia Maybeck.

We concluded the afternoon with a delicious catered dinner.
Representing United: Sandra Johnson, Sue Tarantino, Helen Bross

Welcome to our new seminarian!!



We are delighted to welcome Sarah Jo Gomez-Lorraine to United as our new seminary student for this coming academic year! We are blessed that Serena Leiser will be continuing with us for a second year, and that Sarah Jo will join our team, dividing her time between United and WAMS. We are grateful, too, to Gretchen Switzer who will supervise both Serena and Sarah Jo.

Sarah Jo will begin her third year at Andover Newton Theological School in the fall; she is preparing for ministry as a military chaplain. She was raised in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormon); she joined the UCC and is currently in care with the Hawaii Conference, preparing for ordination in the UCC.

Sarah Jo's background includes musical theatre, missionary service with the Mormon Church, and work as aviation electrician with the Navy....that's the thumbnail sketch! She brings with her a wonderful enthusiasm for ministry and for witnessing to the work and presence of God in this world. Her wife lives and works in Georgia, where Sarah Jo will spend the summer doing her Clinical Pastoral Education chaplaincy requirement.

We look forward to being in ministry with Sarah Jo and to welcoming her to United in September!



In Loving Memory

A service celebrating the life of Priscilla Young will be held in Merriman Chapel on Saturday May 23rd, at 10:00. We give thanks for Priscilla's gentle and kind spirit, and pray for God's comfort for Candace and all who knew Priscilla.

Save the Date:

June 13 – Boston Pride
September 7 – All church picnic at the Brooks Farm after worship
September 12 – Worcester Pride
October 4-5 – Church retreat at Glastonbury Abbey

Calendar - United

May 17 – Plant Swap
May 17 – Worcester Fellowship Lunch Prep and Deliver
May 19 - Bible Study
May 19 – An Evening with Nancy Small
May 24 – Pentecost!
May 26 - Bible Study
May 27 – Board of Ministries
May 31 – Annual Program Meeting
June 2 - Bible Study
June 2 – Women's Book Group
June 7 – Discernment Team
June 8 - Carty Food Cupboard
June 14 - Spiritual Life and Diaconate

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

UCC Calls For End Of Detention Of Immigrant Families

May 12, 2015 - Written by Emily Schappacher

The United Church of Christ is one of almost 200 national groups urging President Barack Obama to end the detention of mothers and children fleeing violence in Central America. In a letter, sent to the White House on Monday, May 11, the organizations call on the Department of Homeland Security to align its detention policies with domestic law and international obligations.

"The detention of immigrant families, who are escaping violence and persecution in their homelands, is immoral and unjust, and a blatant affront to our Christian duty to welcome the stranger," said the Rev. Linda Jaramillo, a national officer of the UCC and executive minister of Justice and Witness Ministries. "The United Church of Christ is one of many national organizations urging the Obama administration to end its practice of detaining families. The president cannot act soon enough to treat our nation's immigrants with respect and compassion, and provide them the help they so desperately seek."

A total of 188 organizations signed the letter, representing faith-based, refugee, immigration, civil rights, human rights, and criminal justice reform groups. The letter, coordinated by the American Civil Liberties Union, states that growing evidence shows that mothers and children detained in various family detention facilities are largely seeking protection in the United States, and that detention has a traumatic impact on the mental health and wellbeing of these families. You can read the rest of the article at:

http://www.ucc.org/news_ucc_calls_for_end_detention_immigrant_families_05122015.