



United Congregational Church



VOICES Newsletter

November 2015



Message from the Pastor

Dear friends –

Of all the stewardship stories I have heard over the years, this is one of my favorite ones:

A friend of mine served on the governing board for his church. When the board held their monthly meeting at the start of their stewardship season, they would spend some time together in prayer, and then each board member would fill out their pledge card and place it in a special box. When all the pledges had been collected, they would join hands in a prayer of blessing for the work and life of the church.

This one year, my friend completely forgot this would be done at the start of their meeting and, as he said, “I panicked! Usually I spend some time looking over my budget – my salary, my expenses, how much money I want to have for fun stuff, what I’ve given to the church the past year.....but now I had no time for that at all!! So I quickly thought about what the church means to me, wrote a number, and put it in the box. When I got home, I looked up what I had pledged for the current year – and realized that I had just pledged more than double that for the year to come! My immediate thought was – what was I thinking?!?! But then I realized that it was actually a blessing that, when it came time to make out my pledge, I was so completely focused on what the church means to me that I gave 100% from my heart! So I kept my spur of the moment pledge, and, to be honest – I felt better about my pledge that year than any other time!”

I love that when he based his pledge on what the church meant to him, he was surprised to see how much more he pledged than when the church was simply one of many items on his budget!

On November 22nd, we will be receiving our pledges for the coming year. Since gifting our building to the Worcester Area Mission Society, our expenses are much, much less than they had been ~ but we still depend on pledges to support our ministries and staff. Our hope is to be able to reach a point where we no longer have to use reserve funds to balance our budget, and we are working toward that goal.

We have been greatly blessed over the past 5 years with a renewed commitment to the ministry and presence of United in this community....and we *continue* to be greatly blessed with members whose faith and vision make us a vibrant witness to the presence and love of God.

When you prepare your pledge for 2016, see what happens if you follow the example of my friend: think about United and what this church means to you and to the larger community...think about the people who share worship with you, the people we serve, the people you hope might join you here...think about how you might support United: financially, with your time, your energy and your prayer.

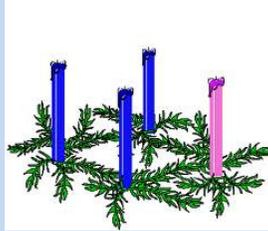
Blessings,
Nancy

All Congregation Thanksgiving Meal Sunday ~ November 22nd ~ after worship



Please come and share in a meal with United Congregational Church Family. You can bring a potluck dish or just come yourself. Most important is for you to come. See you on Sunday!

Looking Ahead to Advent and Christmas!



...it's true: we're almost in the season of Advent, which begins on Sunday November 29th! Please join us for worship during the four Sundays of Advent as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus. We will have a special Christmas program during worship on December 20th ~ details to follow, but you won't want to miss it! On Christmas Eve, we will gather at 5:30 in the Gallery (formerly the sanctuary) for a candlelight service of lessons and carols.

Christmas Poinsettias!



Believe it or not, December 13th is the 3rd Sunday in Advent and Merriman Chapel will be decorated that morning for the season! If you would like to help decorate for Christmas by purchasing a poinsettia in memory or in honor of a loved one, please contact the church office or fill out an order form in the Sunday bulletins on November 29th and December 6th. Poinsettias cost *****; please let the church office know if you would like to donate your poinsettia to one of our less mobile members or would like to bring it home.

Super Saturday Reflections!

Super Saturday is a wonderful offering by the MACUCC (MA Conference of the UCC) – a full day of workshops on a wide variety of topics, bringing together people from UCC churches across the state. Audrey White, Serena Leiser, Sandra Johnson and Helen Bross went to Super Saturday this past October and would love to talk with anyone who is interested about their experiences! Some of their reflections on the day are as follows:

Helen Bross: Workshop on Engaging in Interfaith Dialogue

I have long been interested in the possibilities of interfaith dialogue as a way of increasing understanding and peace in the world. I had Muslim Christian dialogue in mind because of our evening at the Mosque. Although this workshop focused on the pastors experiences with Jewish congregations what we learned would apply to any interfaith relationship.

Rev. Dennis Calhoun of Marblehead and Rev. Marisa Brown Ludwig of Longmeadow had each reached out to the local Rabbis soon after they arrived. Over time they became respected colleagues.

This past June the UCC General Synod adopted a resolution entitled "A Call for the UCC to Take Actions toward a Just Peace in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict". This was very upsetting to many Rabbis and their congregations, especially so as some of the reporting was inaccurate and interpreted as an attack on Israel.

Prior to Synod Marisa and Dennis met with the Rabbis and explained how the Synod worked, the contents of the resolution and what probably would happen. The Rabbis were not happy but pleased that they had been given the heads up. Following Synod they met to debrief and resume ongoing conversations and joint activities.

This was a great workshop. I came away encouraged and with excellent resources.

*****I've emailed a reminder to Audrey, Sandra and Serena – if any of them send you any reflections, please add them here...if they don't, so it goes! Thanks...***

“ Checking In”



In 2010, five years ago, members of United Congregational Church made a bold decision to gift the building at 6 Institute Road and much of the large Endowment to the Worcester Area Mission Society. The Congregation was no longer burdened with the maintenance and upkeep of a large physical plant and would become much less dependent on Endowment Funds. There were significant reductions in staff and programs. Thru an Agreement with WAMS, Worship Services were to continue at 6 Institute Road.

On any Sunday Morning in 2015, there is indeed, an air of excitement at United Congregational Church as members gather in Merriman Chapel for Worship Services and Fellowship. There is a sense of Community as joys, concerns and information regarding upcoming programs and activity is shared.

As our Congregation moves forward, The Board of Ministries is proposing a “Time of Reflection”, to “Check In”. Congregation members will be asked to join in conversations in January, February and March, first to look back at “where we have been” and to share Memories. Then, members will be asked to share thoughts as to “how we are doing now”. At a final gathering, members would be encouraged to share thoughts and dreams about our future and “Who God is calling us to be”.

Thanks to Kelly Gallagher, our UCC Conference Minister who met with the Board of Ministries and shared her wisdom as we considered this “Time of Reflection”.

Plan to join the conversations in the months to come and add your voices and ideas during this “Time of Reflection”.

Dorista Goldsberry, Moderator

Hope for Housing



There are two ways to assist Hope for Housing one is purchasing the Hope for Housing gift cards and the other is clicking on the 'Amazon Smile' Program. As you prepare your additional holiday food as well as gifts, consider using the Hope for Housing Gift Cards and/or clicking on the 'Amazon Smile' program.

Hope for Housing is now participating in the "Amazon Smile" program. Before you shop online at Amazon first type in Hope for Housing, MA. On the site you will find a link to their new Amazon Smile shopping page. By using this link you can shop for items you need and a donation at no added cost to you will be forwarded to the HfH/CMHA homeless prevention program.

I will have additional gift cards for Big Y, CVS, Hanneford, Panera, Shaws, and Stop & Shop with me on Sunday morning. Checks and cash welcome. I'm happy to answer any questions about the program.

Thanks for your participation in this important mission.
Helen Bross

Refugee Resettlement:



A Conversation and Q & A with R.I.A.C.

Sunday, December 6th
11:45AM - 1:00PM
(Light Lunch Offered)

Please join us as we welcome Miriam Gas, Executive Director of R.I.A.C. (the Refugee and Immigrant Assistance Center) with offices in Boston, Lynn, and Worcester. Miriam brings her passion, her energy, and her persistent enthusiasm to this most important work of resettlement. Come hear what is happening, how we can receive and support folks as they look to settle here with their families.

Calendar

November 22 –Thanksgiving Lunch
December 6 – Light Lunch & Conversation (RIAC)
December 8 – Women's Religious Book Club
December 6 - Prayer Shawl Knitting
December 13- Christmas Paper Craft
December 14 -Carty Food Cupboard
December 15 – VOICES Deadline
December 16 – BOM 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/>)

UCC News

Terrorist Attacks Condemned by Global Ministries, World Council of Churches

Written by Connie Larkman



As the people of France grapple with the horror of the latest deadly terrorist attack that left 129 dead, placing candles, flowers and messages outside a Paris cafe, one of several locations targeted by ISIS Friday night, leadership of the United Church of Christ denounced the violence that is terrorizing countries around the world.

"Across the United Church of Christ, we join our hearts with people of faith, conscience and good will as we pray for those who are grieving the tragic loss of life in Paris, Beirut, Syria; and all worldwide who are impacted by terror and violence," said the Rev. Dr. John C. Dorhauer General Minister and President. "We pledge anew to never shirk from the call of our peaceful Creator to work for a better way, a better future, rooted in peace, shalom, salaam for all humankind."

The Common Global Ministries Board of Directors of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ, meeting this weekend in Cleveland, condemned the terrorist attacks in Paris and Beirut, asserting "We reject the use of religion to justify violence."

In a statement, the board said, "We will continue to be among the many voices of churches and faith-based organizations—Christian, Muslim, Jewish, and others—that steadfastly oppose such violence, and that detest the employment of sacred texts to justify such acts. We walk with the people of Lebanon and France, of the Middle East and Europe, and of the entire world, accompanying them in their times of tragedy and despair, hoping with them for release."

More than 350 people were injured in the coordinated attacks around Paris on Friday, Nov. 13, which French President Francois Hollande called the "an act of war."

Coming just 10 months after the attack on the satirical Charlie Hebdo magazine, it was the deadliest terrorist attack in Europe since the Madrid train bombings of 2004, in which 191 people died. And it came less than two weeks after after a Russian plane crashed in Sinai -- downed, intelligence officials believe, by a terrorist bomb -- killing all 224 people aboard.

The World Council of Churches (WCC), in a statement on Saturday, also spoke out against the brutality in Paris: "We cannot and do not accept that such a terrorist atrocity can ever be justified in the name of God or of any religion. Violence in the name of religion is violence against religion. We condemn, reject and denounce it. Let us confront it by holding firm to and upholding the democratic, intercultural and human rights values that this terrorism seeks to attack."

The WCC statement, as with Global Ministries, pledged and encouraged prayer for and solidarity with the victims and those close to them.