



United Congregational Church



VOICES Newsletter

November 2016

Message from the Pastor



Dear friends,

I am writing this two days after the presidential election, and must confess that I am still reeling – not quite able yet to move beyond my response to the hurt and anger and fear expressed by so many people, and felt so deeply in my own heart. I recognize that we – as a country and as people of faith – must and will move forward and come together, bearing witness with more than just words to our belief in justice, equality, respect and peace...

but it will take time to discern how that will happen, and time, perhaps, for our hopes for this country and its place in the world to be restored.

By the time you receive this, we will be wrapping up our stewardship campaign: our financial commitment to supporting the life and ministry of United....we will be starting to let out our belt notches in anticipation of Thanksgiving dinner.....AND we will be looking to the first Sunday in Advent – just ahead on November 27th! And I wonder: what is God's word for us in this season of both such fearful anxiety and joyful hope?

This is a season of thanksgiving for the gifts in our lives....

I am thankful for this congregation ~ for the incredibly faithful people who support this church with time, with money, with prayer: people who step forward again and again to take responsibility for the many behind-the-scenes details essential for keeping even as small a church as United running; people who share leadership and envisioning for each of our ministries and on Sunday mornings; people who pray for our congregation and for me as your pastor; people who carry the "United Light" beyond our doors through mission outreach, visiting less mobile members, and telling friends what a wonderful place this unique community is ~ and is becoming! I am thankful for the grace and love of God embodied in this congregation.

This is also a season of hope....

I hope we will commit to the financial support needed to continue our ministries. I hope we will continue to dream about the kind of church we want to be ~ and make our dreams a reality. I hope and pray we will continue to be the Light of God this world so desperately needs: an ONA and a Just Peace congregation; a church that has, with great faith, shown how to huge risks; a congregation committed to accessibility and radical welcome and environmental stewardship; a church that lives the love and justice and compassionate caring for others that Jesus taught.

During Advent, we sing "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus" ~ praying that God will come and fill our hearts and world with God's own power and grace. And we give thanks for all the ways God already lives through us: shining God's Light and hope into all places of darkness.

Blessings,
Nancy



Advent/Christmas Services at United

Please join us for Sunday worship during Advent, as we prepare our hearts and world for the coming of the Christ Child. On December 18th, we will have a special Christmas program during our regular worship.

Christmas Eve we will worship at 5:30 in the Gallery (the former sanctuary) with a candlelight service of lessons and carols.

Please note that there will not be worship on Sunday morning, Christmas day!

Advent Devotional Booklet: *"Proclaiming the Good News of God's Peace"*

"Proclaiming the Good News of God's Peace" is an Advent devotional from the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program. Each day in Advent offers a theme, scripture, devotional message, thoughtful questions, and guiding prayer. The Task Force on the Spiritual Care of the Elderly (thank you, Jo-an Bott!) has ordered copies for our congregation and they will be available as an Advent gift at Walter's Table.



Christmas Poinsettias!

Believe it or not, **December 11th** 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 fill out an order form in the Sunday bulletins on November **27th** and December **4th**, or contact the church office. The poinsettias cost **\$15.00**. Please place a check-mark on the line provided on the form if you would prefer to bring your flowers home instead of donating your poinsettia to one of our less mobile members.



Annual Holiday Open House

You are cordially invited to the Switzer's home for our Annual Holiday Open House on Sunday afternoon, December 18th, from 2 – 5 PM.

This is an old-fashioned open house, planned so you can come for the whole afternoon or stop by for a few minutes, as your holiday schedule allows.

Either way we would love the opportunity to see you and celebrate friendships, new and old.

Gretchen, Dave, Parker and Sabrina look forward to welcoming you into our home!
At: 6 Chevy Chase Road, Worcester, MA



All that (Holiday) Jazz!

WPI Big Band & Hook Organ

The WPI Big Band directed by Rich Falco, together with Organist Lucia Falco, will treat us to a powerful mix of jazz with a twist! A Worcester Organ Concert presented in partnership with the Worcester Chapter AGO.

THE BROWN BAG LUNCH CONCERT SERIES

WHEN: Wednesday, November 30th

WHERE: At Mechanics Hall / 321 Main Street, Worcester, MA

TIME: Every concert begins at noon and ends promptly at 1:00 pm. Bring your own "brown bag" lunch or purchase one at the Hall while they last!





HEIFER FARM ~ HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSE

Greetings!

You are invited you to the [Holiday Open House](#) at Heifer Farm in Rutland, Massachusetts on December 3-4 and 10-11. Join us for this special event with a Living Gift Market, take your photo with a goat, decorate gingerbread animals and more!

WHEN: December 3,4,10 & 11, 2016

WHERE: 216 Wachusett Street, Rutland, MA 01543
Phone No: 508-886-2221

TIME: 10am-4pm

MORE INFORMATION AT WEBSITE under Events: www.heifer.org/farm

Admission: Canned goods to be donated to the Worcester County Food Bank

Celebrate the holidays with Heifer International and all of the animals that are changing lives around the world. Meet the cows, pigs, sheep, llamas, rabbits, chickens, and other barnyard animals at our Living Gift Market. Take a memorable holiday photo with a goat, enjoy a scenic hayride, warm up with homemade soup, hot cocoa and cider, roast chestnuts, decorate gingerbread cookies, make international crafts and shop at the Donation Station, Fair Trade gift shop, winter farm stand and bake sale.

We wish you a Joyous Christmas Season!

With Gratitude,

Heather Packard
Heifer Farm in Rutland, MA

United Calendar

Nov 20	Thanksgiving Pot Luck
Dec 7	Board of Ministry Meeting
Dec 11	Spiritual Life and Diaconate Ministry Meeting
Dec 12	Carty Food Cupboard
Dec 24	Christmas Eve Worship Service in SSW Gallery

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**



Pastoral Letter to a United Church in a Divided Country

November 09, 2016

"United in Spirit, and inspired by God's grace, we love all, welcome all, and seek justice for all."

Just three weeks ago, the United Church of Christ Board affirmed this as the Mission of the United Church of Christ.

This morning, we wake up to a new reality. Our country and its citizens once again successfully elected a new leader. As we gather to worship this weekend, we will find among us many who are celebrating the decision that was reached – and many who are mourning it. We are, by all measures, a deeply divided people.

Because this election sharply separated us over matters of race, gender, human sexuality, faith, economic inequality, and political persuasions we all bear a heavy burden moving forward. It is our call, our shared mission, to heed the call of God's Spirit and to work to repair damages in our deeply wounded and fiercely broken body.

Mr. Trump was able to win this election in spite of clear evidence from him of racism, homophobia, xenophobia, misogyny, and Islamophobia. This was so blatant that many of his own party's leaders could not endorse him. Many who voted for him knew this, and yet their fears about what is happening in their lives overrode their distaste for his bombast. In their search for a leader not connected to the power base of a government that has been perceived as corrupt, inefficient, and out of touch - his populist rhetoric appealed to them. He must now lead a country where people of color, women, Muslims, immigrants, the disabled, and an LGBT community all feel the sting and impact of his public speech.

But as the United Church of Christ, we will live into our Vision:

"United in Christ's love, a just world for all."

Dear United Church of Christ, we were built to heal bodies broken and divided. This is our calling. Our core values of love, hospitality, and justice for all must be fully embraced in the days to come. It could well be that we were called into being for just such a time as this.

We, the Officers and Council of Conference Ministers of the United Church of Christ, call upon the church to seek a pathway that envisions a just world for all. Those who celebrate this election must show a humility that honors the pain of those whose dreams were dashed by the outcome. Those who grieve must find a courage and hope found in a faith not in earthly power, but in the redemptive love of our Risen Christ.

It is with this humility and faith that we can fulfill our mission: to build a just world for all. We stand in the face of fear and hate and proclaim that "love wins!" We rise up and respond to public derision of "the other" with a full embrace of and warm welcome for all God's beautiful children. We confront the injustices of the powerful with a steady drumbeat of justice.

It seems appropriate to remember the words of the civil rights activist and song-writer James Weldon Johnson:

*God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
Thou who hast brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who has by Thy might
Led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray....
Shadowed beneath Thy hand, may we forever stand,
True to our God, true to our native land.*

We now must stand, true to our God and true to our native land. Let what we do in this time help both America and our denomination become what each name aspires to: A UNITED States of America and a UNITED Church of Christ. And may it be our love of, our welcome to, and our justice for all that unites us.
