



United Congregational Church



VOICES Newsletter

November 2017

Message from the Pastor



Dear friends,

ANY church can put a lovely picture of a Thanksgiving altar or turkey on their November newsletter...how many can (or will?!) put a picture of a dog decorated for the holidays?!?! The groomer to whom we take our dog, Annie, always dresses the dogs post-grooming, and half the fun of bringing her there is to see just how my poor pup will be dressed after each visit! For her November visit, the groomer put a fake turkey beside Annie – and got Annie's picture *immediately* after she enthusiastically licked the fake turkey – thinking ~ *hoping* ~

it was the real thing! So maybe Annie isn't the brightest corn in the cob, but she surely wins points for optimism!

Optimism....surely it is a gift to be one of those "glass half full" people – able to be hopeful and to see possibilities in events and people...and I'm not thinking here of naïve "Pollyannaish" optimism, but rather of the deep trust in God and in humanity that allows us to believe that light shines in darkness and darkness can never put it out.

We have seen too many incidents of violence and hate and terrorism in the past few months – in our country and around the world. We hear inflammatory language from leadership and see people becoming increasingly isolated as they try to protect themselves. We pray for both victims and perpetrators, but we also recognize that prayers alone aren't enough to keep us safe and to heal all that is broken in our world. Jesus tells his disciples they must be "wise as serpents and innocent as doves", and so we have to be aware of our surroundings and our vulnerabilities while at the same time we cannot live in fear.

United is a community of optimism – of seeing possibilities and stepping out in faith. We welcomed eight new members into the church on Reformation Day (October 29th); you can read about them further down in this newsletter. How blessed are we that in the midst of so much that is uncertain in our world, eight people have chosen to join us as a community of faith – witnessing to the Light of God and choosing to shine that Light ourselves?

United is a community of optimism – I see this every week, as we share our prayers, trusting in the power of community to share one another's burdens, trusting that God hears all that is in our hearts. I see it in our commitment to find ways to respond – as people of faith – to the challenges confronting our country.

United is a community of optimism – and we have an opportunity to show our optimism on November 19th, when we will make our financial pledges to support the life and witness of our church. Our financial gifts support not just the staff (pastor, sexton, musician, administrator) and the different ministries of the church (mission outreach, cab fare for those who need it, curricula for our children, worship materials, fellowship times, seminarian, musicians and a whole lot more!) but also shows our commitment to support *this* unique community in *this* time and *this* place. Our support for this church reaches far beyond this church – a witness to our optimism and belief that by “Being the Church” we make a difference in our world.

In this season of giving thanks, I give thanks for the faithful optimism of United and pray God's blessings and guidance in the days to come.

Blessings,
Nancy





You are invited!

Worcester Interfaith Thanksgiving Service
Tuesday, November 21, 2017
7:00pm – 8:00pm

Join the Worcester Interfaith community in a time of thanksgiving, prayer, and song during the week of Thanksgiving. An offering will be collected to support the Worcester Food Bank. Refreshments and fellowship will follow the service.

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WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST MEMBERS!

The following people joined United on October 29th, and we are delighted that they have chosen to become part of this community:

Liz Brooks can often be seen behind a camera, and if you haven't seen one of her photos – you should! They regularly appear in Worcester Magazine...and when we're lucky: at United! Liz enjoys being outdoors, hiking and traveling; along with her partner, Danielle Montgomery, she enjoys music. Liz and Danielle share their home with her grandfather, Emerson.

If you are lucky, you'll sit near **Danielle Montgomery** on Sunday mornings, so you can follow her while singing the hymns! Danielle is a music teacher, and we're counting on her to be part of United's Pickup Choir! Danielle joins Liz in enjoying photography, being outdoors and travelling; she loves having her pets to snuggle. If you want to score points with Danielle, offer her some strong coffee!

Alisa Villarreal is a New England transplant, having moved here from Albuquerque, New Mexico. If you haven't seen her at church lately, it's probably because she had a soccer game. She's been a soccer coach, and just began a job teaching high school science. She and her partner, Ann Rokosky, both enjoy cooking and running...perhaps we can persuade them to share their cooking with us at fellowship time?!

Ann Rokosky is also a teacher, teaching art at Chandler Magnet Elementary School. (Three of our new members are teachers and one is professor at Worcester State University!) Ann and Alisa are both committed to social justice and community service. Ann enjoys reading, and makes beautiful stationery! She has taken courses in jewelry making and brings her creative gifts to all she does.

Donn Kruger is the father of three adult children. He is retired and lives here in Worcester. He enjoys photography and travel. He has been coming to United since this past spring and is glad to have found a church home here.

Bob Michel has recently moved with his wife, Linda, to Worcester from Princeton; he works

as a mental health therapist. Bob has been part of United's Faith and Response conversations, integrating his commitment to social justice with his faith. When not enjoying the many things "city living" has to offer, Bob makes time to enjoy theatre and creative writing.

Linda Michel has recently retired from parish ministry, most recently serving for many years as the pastor of First Congregational Church of Princeton. If you don't see her on a Sunday morning, it's because she's supply preaching at another church; we hope to get her onto our preaching schedule soon! Linda brings her gifts for preaching, worship design and stewardship to United; she is also interested in travel, women and children's issues and advocacy for those who are homeless.

Some weeks we are especially lucky because **Rachel Wiese** comes with her not-quite-yet-toddler daughter, Thea! A life-long Presbyterian, Rachel has found a home here at United, where she is joined many weeks with her husband, Cleve. Rachel is an acting member of the theatre company "Liars and Believers" and teaches acting at Worcester State University. Cleve also teaches at WSU in the English department, and is the faculty advisor for the student on-line magazine "New Worcester Spy".



MESSAGE FROM DEB DUVAL

Hello Dear Ones of United,

I want to first and foremost thank you for the extravagant welcome that you have extended to me in my first two months at United. I have already taken part in so much here: a church picnic, mission's drives, preaching, leading worship, visiting members who can no longer make it to church, welcoming new members, and saying good-bye to beloved colleagues in ministry. My goodness United is a busy and grace-filled place! I am grateful to both Nancy and Tom for their supervision, guidance, prayers and support. And I am especially grateful for YOUR kind words, feedback, and interest in me and my ministry!

One of my favorite hymns is *You are Mine*. You can listen to it here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sgm9lkTNQmc>

This song talks about how God knows us, loves us, and calls us each by name. I know most of you by face and I am learning to know many of you by name, but I am still learning so I would urge you to wear your nametags! This not only helps me, but it also helps any new folks who may be visiting with us to know us by name.

God calls us each by name, let us do the same!

Blessings and peace,
Debbie



WELCOME TO MAE STROSHANE!!

We are delighted to welcome Mae Stroshane as United's musician! Mae joins us beginning on November 19th and we look forward to the musical gifts and enthusiasm she brings! Mae has served as a church musician for over twenty years, most recently as Music Minister at First Congregational Church in Saugus. Mae is a gifted musician, choral leader and composer, equally "at home" with traditional church music, contemporary music, praise music, and rap! Please greet Mae and help welcome her to United!



ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS EVE AT UNITED



Hard though it is to believe, Advent is fast upon us! December 3rd is the first Sunday of Advent, ushering us into the holy season of preparing for the coming of Jesus into our world. We will light the candles of Advent each week during Advent and will fill the church with poinsettias on December 17th, the first Sunday of Advent. December 17th will also be our Christmas pageant Sunday. We will worship together on Christmas Eve morning, as Christmas Eve this year falls on a Sunday. Our traditional candlelight Christmas Eve service of lessons and carols will be in the Sarah Wyman Whitman Gallery (the former sanctuary) at 5:30.

“WELCOMING AND WATCHFUL”

Many churches are looking at their security plans in light of the shooting this past Sunday in Sutherland Springs, Texas. Over the past few years, we have had several conversations at Board of Ministry meetings about security at United, and how to make sure that we are both safe and welcoming. The Rev. Nancy Taylor, Senior Pastor of Old South Church in Boston has used the phrase, “Welcoming and Watchful”, which I think is a helpful way considering security at United.

We will most certainly be discussing security at our November BOM meeting, looking at what we currently do to keep church members and guests safe, while also considering if there are other things we should do. I have served churches that have annual fire drills to make sure everyone is aware of exit plans in case of fire; other church have well-known plans in place in case someone needs emergency medical care. We currently have the following policies and arrangements in place to ensure that United is “welcoming and watchful”:

*No one is ever alone in the building when it is unlocked; on Sunday mornings, whoever arrives first, keeps the door locked until a second person arrives.

*All doors to the church and leading to other areas of 6 Institute are locked on Sunday mornings except the main door through which we all enter; no one, therefore, can enter and roam around the building as they would have to walk through the kitchen or Merriman Chapel to get anywhere else in the building.

***Ed does “rounds” several times during church - walking through the building to make sure nothing is out of place.**

***A while ago, when there were concerns about 2 specific people being disruptive, we had a clear plan in place in which Ed or Tim would escort the person out of the church; I have once or twice reached out to Tim during worship and asked him to check on a situation I was concerned about or to escort someone out of the church.**

***WAMS has security cameras throughout the church and has been able to check footage when there have been security problems.**

We can never anticipate nor protect ourselves from all incidents; we want to be welcoming and we also want all who are visiting, worshipping or meeting at United to be safe and to feel safe. We will continue to address concerns about safety and look at whether we are doing the best we can at being “welcoming and watchful”. Please don’t hesitate to speak to Nancy or to Tim Camp if you have concerns or thoughts about what we might do.



CHRISTMAS POINSETTIAS!

December 17th 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 December 3rd and December 10th. Poinsettias cost \$15; 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.

United Calendar



- Nov 27 Carty Food Cupboard
- Dec 10 Spiritual Life and Diaconate Ministry
- Dec 20 Board of Ministry 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/>)



Rethinking Veterans Day a way better to articulate love of neighbors with military service

November 03, 2017

Written by Connie Larkman

Three ministers with military ties, noting the upcoming Nov. 11 holiday, are encouraging congregations to 'Rethink Veterans Day,' and find ways as a faith community to care for our

service members on Veterans Day and every day.

"From my first days as a chaplain with military service members and their families, I recognized that faith communities had an integral role to play in the post-deployment re-entry and re-integration," said the Rev. Zachary Moon, an assistant professor of Practical Theology at Chicago Theological Seminary. "Processing the complex experiences of military service and the impact on families takes time — and our faith communities are uniquely capable of making this journey of transition into the next chapters of life."

That is why Moon partnered with the Rev. Stephen B. Boyd, UCC Minister for Chaplains and Ministers in Specialized Settings to offer a workshop for congregations which want be more effective in welcoming veterans into their communities; to guide a process of healing and wholeness, rather than simply thanking a veteran for their service. Information on the workshops on Nov. 8, in Burlington, Wisc., and Nov. 10 at Chicago Theological Seminary (CTS) [can be found here](#). The CTS workshop can also be accessed via livestream.

We hope to equip congregations with resources and a way of thinking, doing Veterans Day and Memorial Day differently," said Boyd. "We, as veterans, have so often been a part of those worship services where they ask the veterans to stand, maybe sing a patriotic hymn and then go on to the business of Sunday worship. We are working to create a whole worship service that celebrates veterans and attempts to show how issues can be spoken to directly, addressing the real men and women who have served."

"Congregations can support their 'sons and daughters' with prayer, letters, in addition to offering a special liturgy on days like Veteran's Day, Memorial Day," said the Rev. John Schluep, a UCC minister, former Army Captain, and founder of [Warriors' Journey Home](#), an organization dedicated to helping veterans and their families adjust to life for the returning service member.

A retired pastor of First Congregational Church of Tallmadge, Ohio, Schluep said it is important to focus on "a supportive embrace of the service person," not nationalism or patriotism. "We disagree with the conflict, but support those who have served in it, in a good way."

Military service can mean a lot of different things to each individual, Schluep noted, so the ability to listen, without judgement, is also critical.

"Provide a time for veterans to tell their story and listen without judgment, comment, criticism, or endorsement," Schluep said. "The Warriors' Journey Home mantra is 'Listen — Speak — Heal.' Listen with an open heart. The church needs to find a way to deal with the moral injury of war with our members. A lot of people have done things that aren't very nice. There has to be opportunities for forgiveness, for reconciliation."

"Many churches sincerely wish to do more effective ministry with veterans and military families, but very few have invested in the relational work to make that happen," Moon said. "The most effective congregational works are service oriented projects. Folks in the military care about service and so do most churches I know. If we can see veterans for the leadership and other

strengths, rather than as charity-cases, and build on the shared value of service, we can get the whole congregation including veterans serving the community. The journey into the next chapters of life after military service is much better if veterans experience being a part of a team, doing something worth doing, and building trust with others along the way."

"It takes pastoral leadership," Schluep said. "I work with a lot of vets and they feel a disconnect from the churches they grew up in. I think churches need to recognize both the veterans in their midst, and the people of strong heart, the families of the vet, because they deal with those burdens as well."

"One of the main challenges is the veterans feeling safe in going into churches," Boyd said. "This is also the challenge of churches attempting to create a safe place for veterans to be welcomed. I know that more churches would like to support veterans and have programs available, but for most it is a question of where to start."

"Zachary has written a book, *Coming Home, Ministry That Matters With Veterans And Military Families*, which is a great Bible study for congregations thinking about intentionally doing program around this issue," Boyd continued. "I will be leading a study of the book in my local church after the first of the year. It is a great resource, a very good starting point."

"Being in the military is a spiritual experience," Schluep said. "A kinship community is formed in the military which, in my opinion, is what the church needs to be. Veterans have suffered together. In the military you are taught to take care of the person on your right and the person on your left. The people in the churches who really want to make a difference should aim to replicate that behavior. I think some churches are doing this, but I'd like to see it in greater degrees."

Veterans Day originated as "Armistice Day" on Nov. 11, 1919, the first anniversary of the end of World War I. Congress passed a resolution in 1926 for an annual observance, and Nov. 11 became a national holiday beginning in 1938. In 1954, after lobbying efforts by veterans' service organizations, the 83rd U.S. Congress amended the 1938 act that had made Armistice Day a holiday, striking the word "Armistice" in favor of "Veterans."
