



United Congregational Church



VOICES Newsletter

September 2015



Message from the Pastor

We are a family of faith drawn together by our belief in God and the teachings of Jesus Christ. We are called as an Open and Affirming and Just Peace Congregation to serve, support, and celebrate our diverse community. Being blessed in our downtown location, we, with God's help, seek to provide sanctuary where we can share with and nurture our neighbors and each other.

Dear friends ~

Every week, these words are printed on the heading of our bulletin. I must confess, I've become so used to seeing them that my eyes just skip right over them to the more **important** part of the bulletin: what we're saying and singing and what's being mentioned in the announcements. Not so good on my part! These words I so quickly and routinely skip over (and I suspect I'm not the only one, now, am I?) are what we claim to be our purpose, our mission ~ the heart of who we are.....and why on earth would I (we!) skip over something so important?!?

Take a moment and read again, very slowly and intentionally, these words that are before us every week on our bulletin.....Is there one phrase that especially speaks to you, that is most important for you when you think of the kind of church you want United to be? Is there something missing ~ some ministry or witness that is vitally important to you as a person of faith that you think should be there?

Take a moment and read it through a second time....Is there something here that we do really well? Something we could do better? How?

We're in the early, early stages of intentional conversations about who we are as a congregation and who we want to be ~ *where God is inviting us* ~ and lifting up and reflecting on our statement seems like a good place to begin....hence, really reading it! We have a strong and rich heritage (did you know, for example, that nine separate congregations have merged over the years to form the United we know today?) and a faithful and diverse congregation now. We could continue on exactly as we are ~ meeting needs as they arise ~ or we could intentionally and prayerfully look at the gifts and challenges we have, and discern how we can most faithfully and joyfully live into God's unique call to us. I'm guessing you know what I hope we will do!

One last time: read through our mission statement, only this time, as you read each line, try praying it ~ asking God to help us live out our covenant promises and to guide us in faithful witness, and giving thanks for all the ways God works through us in this time and place.

Blessings,

Nancy

Media Violence Fast



The Missions and Outreach Ministry is promoting the UCC Media Violence fast from September 15 to 21. United is one of just a handful of Just Peace churches in Massachusetts. This means that as a congregation we have committed ourselves to seeking justice through peace. By fasting from violent programming, we can appreciate just how pervasive it has become. The fast ends on September 21st, which the United Nations has recognized as “International Day of Prayer for Peace.” To sign up online visit www.media-fast.org, or sign the pledge poster in Merriman Chapel.

Are You Interested in Becoming a Member of United?



Anyone interested in becoming a member or associate member of United is invited to an information gathering after church on September 27th in the meeting room; a light lunch will be provided. Please speak to Nancy if you are interested. We plan to receive new members during the service on Sunday October 4.

Thank you, thank you, thank you ~ ~ ~



~ ~ ~ to all who supported our presence at **Worcester Pride!** Thank you to those who planned what we would do, those who walked and carried our banner, those who knit and packaged pocket prayer shawls and prayers, those who staffed our table, and those who prayed for our witness there! Especially – thank you to Itiel Febles who truly “herded cats” in getting us organized! There was clearly a wonderful presence for United that day!

~ ~ ~ to all who organized our picnic at Emerson Brooks’ home! In spite of the damp and drizzle, the picnic was a gathering of wonderful fellowship and delicious food (as always!!)! Many thanks to the Fellowship and Community Ministry for arranging the event, to Carolyn Droser and Andy Dzaugis for serving as chefs, to all who brought food – and especially to Emerson for hosting us!

Serena’s Back for another year!!

Hello Church Family,

I can’t begin to tell you how great it was to be back at United last Sunday. While it was nice to be back at my home church for the summer (even got to preach there a few times) I really missed United. Coming back to be greeted with so many smiles and hugs was truly a blessing. I am so looking forward to this year, especially since my dear friend Sarah Jo will also be joining United as a second student minister. One of our first joint ventures will be co-facilitating the retreat in October. Hope to see many of you there. In addition to being at United for a second year, and working with WAMS again, I am also doing my Border Crossing with Worcester Fellowship. A Border Crossing is when you serve in an area that is very different from your “norm”. With Worcester Fellowship, I will have the opportunity to participate in their listening ministry with the homeless and

work directly with women who are in recovery from any type of addiction. Since I feel called to a ministry of social justice, this is going to be an incredible learning experience for me. And in my spare time I will be taking an online course "The Psychology and Theology of Forgiveness". I am sure this is going to give me some rich information and inspiration for a future sermon. Blessings to all, Serena.

Welcome to Sarah Jo



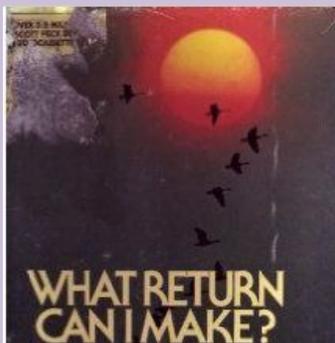
Who is this Sarah Jo? Prior to enrolling at Andover-Newton Theological School, I received my B.F.A. from New York University. I spent ten years as a professional theatre actress and singer, working in companies around the country including New York, Las Vegas and a year in China. On the 18th of July 2013 I changed jobs from being an Aviation Electrician for the Navy and accepted my commission into the Navy Chaplain Candidacy Program for Officers and am now a Naval Officer in the rank of Lieutenant Junior Grade (LTJG). I am the proud wife of LaReina Gomez-Lorraine who proudly serves Active Duty in the US Army stationed at Fort Benning, Georgia, soon to be stationed at Kellar Army Hospital in West Point, NY. Together we are raising our two wonderful pups Walter and Stanley.

My religious background started when I was born and baptized Catholic, raised in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and served 18 months as a full-time missionary. I wish to express my sincere gratitude to be a Member in Discernment in the Oahu Association and Windward Congregation in Hawaii with the United Church of Christ. I feel blessed to study for future ministry in the United Church of Christ at United Congregational UCC in Worcester. Thank you United for such an extravagant welcome of love.

Life is good, God is even greater!

With a grateful heart,
Sarah Jo

"WHAT RETURN CAN I MAKE?" *



OCTOBER 24-25, 2015 RETREAT

Are you aware of your gifts and talents? Are you still discerning your gifts and talent? Do you want to know what to do with the gifts and talents God has given you? If the answer to any of these questions is "yes", then join us on this year's retreat at the Glastonbury Abbey, Hingham, MA. There will be time for sharing, learning, growing, praying, meditating, creating, walking, and just having fun!! Along with group activities, there will also be an opportunity for personal quiet time.

Cost for the retreat is \$85 which includes overnight accommodations, meals, and materials. (Please speak with Serena if you need financial assistance in order to attend the retreat.) Registration deadline is October 4, and full payment must accompany your registration form (at the end of this document)

Retreat leaders will be Seminarians Serena Leiser and Sarah Jo Gonzales-Lorraine.

For more information, please contact Serena at sleiser1@verizon.net or 508-870-3242.

*Title of book/tape by M. Scott Peck which will be used during the retreat, but it is not necessary to purchase a copy.



In Memorium

We hold in prayer the friends and family of **Steven Bernier**, as they mourn his death this past week. Steven was an associate member of United and treasured his membership here, as well as his commitment to the community to which he ministered in Fall River. He has often been in our prayers in recent years, as he dealt with the aftermath of a car accident and most recently struggled with treatment for cancer. Steven's faith was always visible in his words and actions, and he was grateful for the prayers, support and witness of his church family at United.

We give thanks for his life, mourn his passing, and entrust him in Christian love to the God he loved and served.

Beggars Bowl - SAVE THE DATE!



10th Annual Beggar's Bowl Fundraiser will be held on Tuesday, October 13th, 5:30pm, at First Baptist Church. Come enjoy artisan bread and a bowl of homemade soup, served in a hand-thrown stoneware bowl which you get to take home! Donation: \$50, For more information, call Worcester Interfaith (508) 754-5001

The Jolly Beggars and CROP: Perfect Together!!



Saturday, September 26th, 7:00 at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Holden ~ a benefit concert for CROP featuring none other than the Jolly Beggars! How better to support the wonderful mission of CROP to end world hunger than with an evening of great music? \$10 admission goes to support CROP; children admitted free with a canned good donation.

First Friday Ecumenical Prayer with Taize Chants

September 4, 2015 through June 3, 2016
8:00 pm
Chapel of the Holy Spirit
Assumption College
500 Salisbury Street, Worcester, MA
Phone: 508-340-8578

Calendar

Sept 22 – Bible Study
Sept 22 – Women's Religious Book Group
Sept 23 – Board of Ministries
Sept 29 – Bible Study

Oct 6 – Bible Study
Oct 11 – Spiritual Life and Diaconate
Oct 13 – Bible Study
Oct 19– Carty Food Cupboard
Oct 20– Bible Study
Oct 24-25 – Church retreat at Glastonbury Abbey
Oct 29 – Bible Study
Oct 28 – Board of Ministries

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

Cookies with a Cop could be another one-church tradition



Take a United Church of Christ General Synod tradition, add a new twist, and "Cookies with a Cop," is the result. A grassroots program that started after Synod this summer is geared to building relationships between police officers and the community they serve. It's off to such a good start in Greater Cleveland that local organizers hope it can become a wider church tradition. The latest chapter unfolded Sept. 13 at First Congregational UCC in Hudson, Ohio.

As part of its "First Serve—Serve First" annual day of service, church volunteers baked enough chocolate chip cookies to fill 30 plastic containers. Captain Keith Sulzer of the Cleveland Police Foundation attended a thank-you potluck as festivities ended Sunday and accepted the cookies, which officers will share with children and adults along their routes. Once empty, the plastic containers will store coloring and other art supplies and be placed in the cruisers. When officers encounter a situation where children need to be removed temporarily from a dangerous circumstance, the children can use the supplies in the box while the officers calm the situation.

"This is the kind of thing police officers need to do more of," Sulzer told the potluck audience. "We have to form relationships and start communications and start conversations. A cookie is a very simple idea that I think can make some friends ... The more of these kinds of activities you do, the less problems we're going to have in the future. And I think it's going to multiply."

"Cookies with a Cop" is the "legacy of the UCC's General Synod 2015," said Sue Wimer, co-chair of the Synod Local Arrangements Committee and a member of First Congregational UCC.

That's because at each UCC General Synod — the national, biennial meeting of the denomination — local church members bake and deliver cookies to the convention so that delegates and visitors have free snacks during the five-day meeting. But this year, the bakers got carried away, so there were lots and lots of cookies. Some 50,000 cookies to be exact.

The 352 local UCC churches in Ohio sent so many cookies to the Cleveland Convention Center that by Sunday, June 28, planners knew they had a huge surplus. In a chance conversation with undercover Cleveland police officer Sam Anderson, "Cookie Queen" Gwen Zielasko (also of First Congregational UCC in

Hudson) told him, "I could probably give you enough cookies to put a box or two in every cruiser in Cleveland, and you could just hand them out."

Anderson shared that with Sulzer and by the next morning, a police van stopped at Synod, picked up cookies, and distributed them near a day drop-in center in downtown Cleveland. A second police van took cookies to a women's shelter.



A June 30 post on the Cleveland Police Foundation's Facebook page and website describing "Cookies with a Cop" was picked up by several police departments and groups across the country who would like to start the tradition in their communities. "Thank you, United Church of Christ and Gwen from Hudson for thinking of the police and helping us foster a better relationship with the community we serve," the post concluded.

Locally, Wimer would like to see United Church of Christ congregations throughout Greater Cleveland bake chocolate chip cookies each June and deliver them to the Cleveland Police Department or to their own local police departments. She dreams of it becoming a nationwide event.

The partnership between the Cleveland Police Foundation and First Congregational UCC in Hudson doesn't stop with the cookies. During First Serve—Serve First, Sulzer coordinated a large service project with Hudson youth director Steve Hockstra. Activities included cleaning alleys and vacant lots, helping out at urban gardens, and laying a brick pathway and seeding the lawn at the Fulton Reading Garden.

Many cities struggle with the idea of police and community relations, said the Rev. Peter Wiley, pastor of First Congregational. "To have that opportunity for police to interact with some of the residents in such a simple way as [sharing] a cookie and a bottle of water, for me, is one of the most 'beginning to heal' type activities that to me is just ingenious."

"It's just a simple thing – a beginning. But unless you begin, you'll never get anywhere."