



From the Pastor's Pen

February 2023
The Epistle



seeking:
honest questions
for deeper faith

Lent begins on February 22 with Ash Wednesday. This year's lectionary for Lent offers us many stories of Jesus encountering people who are seeking: Nicodemus comes to him in the veil of night, he approaches a Samaritan woman at a well, he heals a man born without sight. In these stories, each person is seeking a new beginning, a different life, a deeper faith. What unfolds is an exchange filled with questions and exploration. Often, an unveiling occurs—assumptions are disrupted, a new perspective is revealed, mystery grows.

This Lent, I invited you on a journey with me—a journey of answer seeking and question asking. (Questions **are** central to the Interim period.) Many of our weekly questions feel restorative (“Can these bones live?”). Some feel like a charge or challenge (“Who will you listen to?”). Some questions are hopeful and curious (“How do we begin again?”). Our questions won't necessarily lead to answers, but they can help us find clarity and a new perspective. Ultimately, we pray they lead to a new beginning, a restoration, a wider grace.

Like the characters in our Lenten scriptures, we are also seeking many things: clarity, connection, wonder, justice, balance. We are seeking our calling, the sacred, and how to live as a disciple. Throughout the turbulence of the past few years, many of us are asking big questions about our lives and our faith. My hope is that this series will help us unpack some of those big questions in ways that are honest and faithful. Throughout this season, my hope is that you will continually ask yourself: what am I seeking? What is God seeking?

This Lent, I invite you to engage in the spiritual practice of seeking. I encourage you to stay curious, open, and nimble. I hope you will soften your assumptions and expand your perspectives. I pray that these questions will create a safe space to explore—to be drawn more deeply into the fullness of life, into the heart of God.

Available for everyone in the congregation will be daily devotional cards, a weekly devotional to help reflect on Sunday's worship theme, and family support materials for the seven weeks between Ash Wednesday and Easter. From worship to home let the question asking, answer seeking, and deep listening commence.

JOYS AND CONCERNS

For our members, family and friends hospitalized, ill and in need of prayers, may God bless and watch over you:

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| Dolores Tamulen | Jan Gordon |
| Tariq Malik | James Gallant |
| Bobbie DiBattista | Dot |
| The Murphy family | Audrey Brogan |
| Brian & June Coombs | Eleanor Brogan |
| Charlie Snell | Lorna Ducharme |
| Bob Andersen | Roxxe and Chris |
| Lindsey Kuchta | Bryan Castle |
| Steve Collar | Carole Christensen |
| Sally Calhoun | Sally Aalto |
| Shirley Saari | Don McKendry |
| Eddie Hannula | Sally Aalto's friend, Marge |
| Dee Smith | Peter Rakowski |
| Kitty Paiste | |

More information can always be shared privately with Pastor Stacey at fccw.pastor@outlook.com or (603) 903-5621.



Dear Members of The First Congregational Church,

May thanks to all of you & especially to LeeAnn Gikis for the lovely poinsettia plant.

It's not easy to lose a beloved mother, especially during the holidays. I was so touched by this act of kindness (and I'm sure my mom was too!).

Best wishes for a happy and healthy 2023.

Sincerely,
Cathy & Gary McDonald

December 31, 2022

The Westminster Community Food Pantry greatly appreciates your generous donation of \$554.00. It is through the generosity of individuals, organizations, and local businesses that the pantry is able to continue to help families in our area.

On behalf of the pantry volunteers and families we serve, thank you for caring and helping.

Sincerely,
Mary Ann Murphy
On behalf of the volunteers of the WCFP

Thank you for the "Get Well" cards from the Women's Fellowship, the Diaconate, and many friends at the time of my recent illnesses. Your messages brightened my days and I'm sure your thoughts and prayers helped me to recover very quickly.

In faith,
Mary Dunn

Worship Live Streaming

The Deacons and Pastor Stacey have been discussing the merits of returning to providing our worship services online through YouTube and/or Facebook. We are hoping there are a couple of volunteers in the church willing to learn about how to do this and help us make it happen on Sunday mornings. We have learned that live-streaming reduces the necessary work after worship, though adds a bit of coordination for our staff before.

Pastor Stacey is able to teach anyone who might be interested in helping us with this task. The necessary skills are: comfort with computers that you would be able to follow a step-by-step guide; an artistic eye that would lead you to shift a camera angle for a better picture; an awareness of how to navigate online search engines.



We have received notification from Amazon that as of February 20th, the AmazonSmile program will be discontinued.

All purchases through this program until that date will be honored.



The Epistle will have months that are combined. March & April, July & August, December & January. Submissions for March/April are due Tuesday, February 22nd.

Our congregation will be hosting “Scouting Sunday” on February 5th!

If you are or have been a scout, please join us!

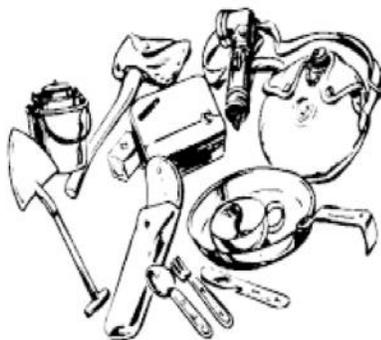
Please invite your scouting neighbors and friends too!

Invitations are being extended to the scouts meeting in our building.

This will be a slightly less than traditional worship service focused on connection

with each other and the earth that we are stewards of.

As is our tradition on the first Sunday of each month, we will gather around the Communion Table.



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Please join the Christian Education Committee and the Church School youth after church on February 5th in creating Valentines for parishioners who are not able to worship with us in church.



SCOUTS

The Scouts BSA Troop 33 is doing a fundraiser for old or unwanted sneakers any condition as long as its a pair. You can drop them off at Westminster library. There's a drop off box in the children's area. They will either get cleaned and donated or recycled; children's or adult sneakers any condition, please help our Scouts help others and raise money.



Looking Forward to Lent

Seeking Together: Lenten Lunch

Every Wednesday, beginning February 22nd through the end of Lent from 11:30am-1pm.

This weekly mid-day Table Fellowship experience will draw us into the weekly questions and Sunday's scripture passage. Join Pastor Stacey for this Bible study and faith exploration series.

February 22nd 7pm Ash Wednesday Service

April 6th 7pm Maundy Thursday Service of Community, Intimacy and Interdependence

April 7th 7pm Good Friday Service of Sorrow and Lament

(The Maundy Thursday and Good Friday services will flow one into the other as we travel with the Disciples and Jesus from a shared meal into the garden and then from the Garden to the cross.)

April 8th 6am Easter Morning Sunrise Service (Academy Hill)

9:30am Traditional intergenerational Easter Worship





2023

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1 6:30-8:00 PM Boy Scouts (CH) 7:00 PM AA (FH)	2 6:30 PM Choir Rehearsal 6:30- 7:30 PM Food Pantry	3 Office closed	4
5 9:30 AM Intergenerational Worship	6 8:00 AM Meditation (Zoom)	7 8:00 AM Yoga 10:00 AM Staff (Parlor) 7:00 PM Diaconate	8 6:00-8:00 PM Cub Scouts CH 7:00 PM AA (FH)	9 3:00 PM Trustee (FH) 6:30 PM Choir Rehearsal 6:30- 7:30 PM Food Pantry	10 Office closed	11
12 9:30 AM Church School 9:30 AM Worship Service 10:45 AM Church Council	13 8:00 AM Meditation (Zoom) 6:00-7:30-Cub Scouts (FH)	14 8:00 AM Yoga 10:00 AM Staff (Parlor)  <i>Valentine's Day</i>	15 11:30a 1p Lenten Lunch (FH) 6:30-8:00 PM Boy Scouts (CH) 7:00 PM AA (FH)	16 5:30 PM Choir Rehearsal 6:30- 7:30 PM Food Pantry 5:45-7:30 PM Cub Scouts (CH)	17 Office closed	18
19 9:30 AM Church School 9:30 AM Worship Service 10:45 AM Outreach Comm.	20 8:00 AM Meditation (Zoom) <i>Office closed</i> <i>President's Day</i>	21 8:00 AM Yoga 10:00 AM Staff (Parlor) 6:00-7:30 PM Cub Scouts 1:00 PM Safe Church <i>EPISTLE DUE FOR MARCH & APRIL</i>	22 11:30a 1p Lenten Lunch (FH) 6:30-8:00 PM Boy Scouts 7:00 PM AA (FH) 7:00 PM Ash Wednesday Service <i>Ash Wednesday</i>	23 5:30 PM Choir Rehearsal 5:45-7:30 Cub Scouts CH 6:30- 7:30 PM Food Pantry	24 Office closed	25
26 9:30 AM Church School 9:30 AM Worship	27 8:00 AM Meditation (Zoom) 6:00-7:30 PM Cub Scouts (FH)	28 8:00 AM Yoga 10:00 AM Staff (Parlor) 6:00 PM Generous Giving				



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12 9:30 AM Church School 9:30 AM Worship Service (Sanctuary)	13 8:00 AM Meditation (Zoom) 6:00-7:30 PM Cub Scouts (FH)	14 8:00 AM Yoga 10:00 AM Staff (Parlor)	15 11:30a 1p Lenten Lunch (FH) 6:30-8:00 PM Scouts (CH) 7:00 PM AA (FH)	16 5:30 PM Choir Rehearsal 6:30- 7:30 PM Food Pantry 5:45-7:30 Cub Scouts (CH)	17  Office closed	18
19 9:30 AM Church School 9:30 AM Worship Service 10:45 AM Annual Meeting Sanctuary <i>One Great hour of Sharing</i>	20 8:00 AM Meditation (Zoom) 6:00-7:30 PM Cub Scouts (FH)	21 8:00 AM Yoga 10:00 AM Staff (Parlor) 6:00-7:30 PM Cub Scouts (FH)	22 11:30a 1p Lenten Lunch (FH) 6:30-8:00 PM Scouts (CH) 7:00 PM AA (FH)	23 5:30 PM Choir Rehearsal 6:30- 7:30 PM Food Pantry	24 Office closed	25
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Church School News: In the Deep Blue

Our Church School is now utilizing curriculum published by Cokesbury. In the Deep Blue is flexible in the units that are purchased, making it possible for us to support the current year's theme of Bible Heroes and to fully return to the rotation model of teaching and exploring the Bible, which has worked for our congregation for many years now.

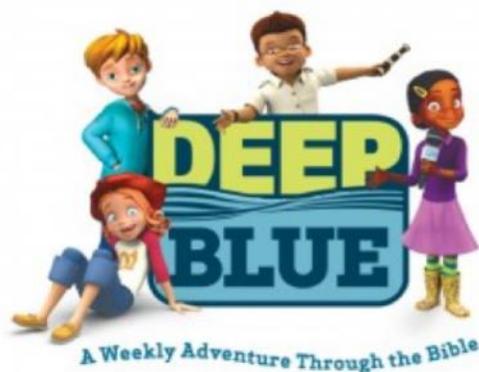
Rotation church school programs base weekly lessons on a different learning and engagement style (cooking, story-telling, science, art, missions, spiritual practices, and games) with each Sunday. Our children and youth will be approaching the stories of Esther, Elijah, Abraham, Moses and Miriam between now and Children and Graduate Sunday (June 11th) in that order. Two added benefits are offered to us through this curriculum.

The first is a family page to be printed and shared with families who attend each Sunday so that learning from Church School can be enhanced at home. The second is the ability for us to share questions each Sunday in the bulletin so that our faith community can talk with our children and youth, too, about their learnings.

This curriculum is focused on ensuring the children know the story through a variety of lenses. While the core story stays the same each week, the details learned expand. For instance, in the unit on Esther children learn through cooking about the Jewish Holiday of Purim. They cook traditional foods together and they learn how these foods tell the story of Esther Through "Telling the Story" the children learn about different truths of what it was like for the Jewish people to live under Persian rule. They explore what a diaspora is and what exile means. Fasting is explored as a spiritual practice and the curriculum invites the children and youth to explore fasting as a way of praying to God as well as a tool for making a stand in the public realm. The core perspective on this curriculum is aligning our choices in life with our faith—a faith that tells us with God, all things are possible.

Have you considered teaching Church School?

Christian Education is looking for teachers. We will be running a "training" for those interested in how to use the curriculum and engage children and youth in a one room classroom model at their age levels. Ideally three or four members of the congregation would say yes to this, allowing us to create a rotation of teachers who approach lessons according to their passions as they fit the above engagement styles. This would also allow us to ensure that we have the ability to break out into age groups for more appropriate activities. If you are open to considering this, please reach out to Pastor Stacey or Beth Heckman.



CHRISTIAN OUTREACH



First Congregational Church will be participating in “Souper” Bowl Sunday this year.

We are asking everyone to bring cans of soup (please check the expiration dates) to church on Sunday, February 12th for our food pantry.

This is a great way to participate and help fill our food cupboard with nourishing and warming soup. There is nothing like a nice cup of warm soup on a cold day. Good for the soul and good for the body.

If you can't make it to church on Sunday February 12th you can drop off your donations at the side entrance of the church at any time.

Thank you for participating in this very worthy cause.

The Outreach Committee



What is a Transition Team? Why are we using one?

A few years ago, as the formerly three Conferences initiated ministry as one, the National UCC released a new profile to be used in Congregations. This new profile is structured to be a self-assessment of the church and to correlate with the work typically taken on during Transition Periods in congregations and traditionally lead by Intentional Interims. The goal of the Congregational Profile in being designed for self-assessment is that at any point in time, the church can turn to it to reinstate a visioning phase of ministry and an assessment of where the congregation has been in recent years.

The UCC learned that in order for this to happen, churches need to create a community base of knowledge for how to make this happen. It is no longer sufficient for a Transitional Minister to enter a congregation between settled pastorates to engage in this assessment and vision work. We now recognize that frequent assessment of the whole church system and how it is serving to support the mission and vision of the church is essential to congregational health and vitality. With the world changing as rapidly as it is pastoral leadership is strengthened when the church holds a clear picture of where the congregation is heading.

Establishing a Transition Team to walk with the Intentional Interim during a pastoral transition creates that necessary base of knowledge in the church about how to engage in the work of assessing ministry as well as developing goals, clear missional values and vision for the future. The Transition Team becomes the institutional memory of how and why the Congregational Profile was written as it was, of how the questions were asked of the congregation, and who was present in the conversations. The Transition Team ensures that the whole congregation is engaged in the work it is responsible to during this phase of its life together.

In addition, asking a Transition Team to work with the Interim to develop the Congregational Profile makes the work of the Pastoral Search Team more manageable. The work of one team flows into that of the other. With so many churches realizing burnout of leadership and the reality that most churches are struggling to fill administrative roles, this is now the recommended process nationwide in the UCC and was adopted by the Southern New England Conference during the realities of the COVID 19 Pandemic.



Questions & Answers

Coat Drive

There is a box outside of Stacey's office for gently worn coats. It will remain there so that anyone doing spring cleaning (once winter leaves us) might choose to part ways with a coat or jacket.

Bring it in! :)

Thank you,
Anne Ring



PLEASE HELP OUR FATHER'S HOUSE

Our Father's House, the homeless shelter in Fitchburg, welcomes donations of new and gently used twin sheets, towels, shampoo, soap, toothbrushes, toothpaste and other toiletries. There is a container on the stage in Fellowship Hall where you can place your donations. Your generosity is appreciated by Our Father's House!

**The First Congregational Church
of Westminster
United Church of Christ
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The Epistle
February 2023
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Visit our Website at www.westcong.org

Don't Miss the
DEADLINE!

**Tuesday
February 21, 2023**

**The next Epistle will be for
March and April submissions**



The heart of a friend

Big-hearted friendliness comes from generously serving others.

Directions: Start with the first D and move according to the arrows beneath the blanks. Then fill in the letters to complete 1 Peter 4:8-10.

U	D	P	L	Y	G	D	G	I	B
R	E	E	B	C	E	N	G	F	T
I	S	S	V	O	K	L	L	E	S
N	Y	R	E	A	L	N	B	R	V
S	H	O	I	T	I	U	M	G	E
L	M	S	P	Y	G	R	P	R	A
O	Q	B	C	J	K	V	Q	E	C

Above all, love each other D , because love

 over a multitude of . Offer

 to one another without

 . Each of you should use whatever

 you have received to others, as faithful

 stewards of God's in its various forms.

1 PETER 4:8-10, NIV

Answer: deeply, covers, sins, hospitality, grumbling, gift, serve, grace