

News from the Pews

First Congregational Church/UCC
Ashfield, MA 01330

FEBRUARY 2018

MINISTER'S MOMENT

It's about that time of winter when I find myself making a real effort to keep on moving... Moving toward the slightest moments of increasing daylight; moving toward the possibilities that things will not always look so gloomy, and sloppy, and cold. I'm especially feeling this tension in an effort to focus on the Spirit's perspective rather than on all the other ones which vie for my attention, particularly when it comes to the deeply discouraging events coming out of our nation's capital... (What's that saying about "all politics are local?!")

As such, I sometimes go searching outdoors for fresh insights, and at other times, I "bookworm" my way into the blogs and newsletters and media worlds where more truth and light are to be had. So it is that I learn of the new book by Sandhya Rani Jha, entitled *Transforming Communities; How people like You Are Healing Their Neighborhoods*. Commenting on this collection of stories from around the country, Ms. Jha describes how voice, vision and hard work came together in one Massachusetts neighborhood:

But my favorite story for years and years is the story of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative in Boston. Most of us assume that the solution to problems in our community is well-run nonprofits. And most nonprofits feel the same way. (I know I do, as the director of a nonprofit!) So a major charitable foundation gets all of the nonprofit leaders together to propose a solution to the problems in a really underserved neighborhood in Boston, but a few people living in the neighborhood learn about it and show up to the meeting. They say "hey; how come you're always talking ABOUT us but never talking WITH us?" And the foundation is shocked, because they thought that by meeting with the nonprofits, they WERE meeting with the people from the community. So they started the process from scratch, this time with community meetings that churches (and some nonprofits!) helped coordinate, to capture the voices and commitments of the people who lived there day in and day out. Thirty years later, that neighborhood has developed a pathway to home ownership and small businesses as well as amazing community building and culturally resonant educational opportunities. The city government wouldn't have created that structure, and neither would the nonprofits or the foundation. But by creating space for the people's voice, vision and hard work to be part of the plan, it is a community very different from most "urban renewal" programs you see today. (See the Chalice Press blog at: <http://bit.ly/2no6ewl>)

This got me thinking, friends, about how we often talk ABOUT issues and problems and other dynamics of our context, rather than WITH those involved... Are we meeting up with the stories in our community? Where and when? Could this be a part of God's movement in our midst, to newly engage what we know and who we know, so as to reposition us for new ministries in the coming years?

I hope you'll plan on being a part of our next **Envisioning 2018** gathering next Sunday, Feb. 4th, (after worship and a potluck) as Rev. Kelly Gallagher and I facilitate an information session about the partnership between congregation and conference as we transition into a Search process together. If you were unable to be a part of our first meeting in January, plug the following address into your browser: <https://466742173459757787.weebly.com/> and look for the "blog" tab on the top right hand of the screen – there you'll find a **summary from that meeting on Jan 7th, 2018**.

I hope you'll be speaking up about the commitments you think we can and should make as this new chapter unfolds in 2018. See you next Sunday?

Pastor Nada

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February Choir News 2018

In February the Choir at First Congregational Church plans to forget about cabin fever by enjoying Wednesday evening rehearsals, Sunday morning singing, the Hilltown Variety Show, and the annual "Save heat" potluck dinner and rehearsal.



Music for the first two Sundays in the month will include early American anthems and African-American spirituals and Gospel settings. Some of this music will also be performed at the February 10th Hilltown Variety Show to be held at the church, along with other music for choir and organ. On Sunday, Feb. 25, the Choir will sing Renaissance anthems for Lent.

Margery Heins is Choir Director, and **Amy Roberts-Crawford** accompanies the Choir and is Organist.

For more information about joining either Adult Choir or Youth Choir, please call Margery Heins at 413-625-8461. New voices are welcome!



ABOUT OUR CHURCH

Interim Pastor: Rev Nada Sellers: church 628-4470. Sunday morning Worship is at 10:00am. Children and Sunday School are concurrent with Worship. The governing body of the church is its members, who traditionally gather the second Sunday of March, June, September and December at 11:30 am for the Monthly Congregational Meeting. Call or email the church clerk, Wendy Pree (628-3875),

wendypree@gmail.com; or the church moderator, Keith Obert (625-0022), obert@aol.com) with any issues/concerns you wish to include on the agenda by the Wednesday preceding the meeting.

FRIENDS AND MEMBERS ARE WARMLY WELCOMED!

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Victoria Nelson at nelsonvictoria173@gmail.com

Feb. 2018 Choir Schedule

Sun. Feb. 4: 9:00 Rehearsal; 10:00 Service

Weds. Feb. 7: 7:15 - 9:00 or TBA Rehearsal

Sat. Feb. 10: 6:00 or TBA Call time for 7:00 p.m. Hilltown Variety Show

Sun. Feb. 11: 9:00 Rehearsal; 10:00 Service

Weds. Feb. 21: 7:15 - 9:00 Rehearsal

Sun. Feb. 25: 9:00 Rehearsal; 10:00 Service

Weds. Feb. 28: 7:15 - 9:00 Rehearsal

(TBA: annual "Save heat" Wednesday potluck/rehearsal)

Margery Heins

First Congregational Church of Ashfield Hosts the Hilltown Variety Show 2018! in the Newly Renovated Sanctuary Showtime: Saturday Feb. 10, 7pm

First Congregational Church of Ashfield.
429 Main Street
(Route 116 across the street from Town Hall)

Jeannine Haas
(one of organizers)

[413-268-3850](tel:413-268-3850),

From the Trustees

Stewardship Campaign Over the Top

In our annual Stewardship Campaign, we challenged ourselves to increase our pledges from the level of about \$55,000 that we had sustained over the past few years. To anticipate the need for increased ministerial and staff salaries, we set a goal of a 10% increase to \$60,500. At our most recent posting, we now have pledges of \$60,857! Many thanks to all who pledged. What a wonderful testament to the commitment and dedication of a caring congregation.

If Writing a Check

In the course of our Stewardship Campaign, as well as our three-year Capital Campaign, many of us wrote checks, but in some cases our bank would not accept them *unless* they were made out to the "First Congregational Church of Ashfield." Apparently the bank is concerned about not confusing our Ashfield church with other First Congregational Churches. Therefore please ensure that checks to the church specify Ashfield.

Thank you.

Ted Murray



An Update on Celebrating with Sarah

As many of you know, Rev. Sarah Pirtle will soon be finishing her service as the Director of Youth and Family Education at First Congregational Church in Ashfield. After consultations with Sarah and parents, we'd like to update everyone as to the following plans for the coming weeks:

On Feb. 4th, the first Sunday of the month, Sarah will offer a children's time activity during worship and then, Sarah and the children will share a goodbye time of card making for each other during Sunday School. After coffee hour, parents, children, and others who are interested will gather in the Sunday School room to use the Peace Rope (created by Rosa Stegeman, Gabriel and Leora Fisher) to share in a ceremony of connection.

Finally, on Feb. 11th, the whole congregation will share in a farewell service for Sarah. We will include elements of remembering and sending which will incorporate a blessing for Sarah's wide peace and music ministry called Hope Sings. There will also be Sunday School time that day offering songs and games. An extra festive spread of foods for sharing will be offered during our coffee and fellowship time following worship.

If you can't be there on the 11th and want to have something read or you have a suggestion of what could be included, pass it to me at my email which is ashfieldrev@gmail.com.

This is certainly a time of transitions, and yet, in Sarah's words, "we will continue to be connected in the life of the church and in our community." Please plan on joining in as many of these opportunities to worship and celebrate with Sarah as you can.

With gratitude,

Pastor Nada and the Deacons

WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP

Walls closing in? Cabin fever?

Join us for lunch and/or coffee at Elmer's. Thursday, February 8th and Thursday, February 22nd, at 1:00 p.m.

Call **Diana Bennett** for info.

628-4523.

COUNCIL ON AGING

FEBRUARY 1, 2018

Beef Soup, Tossed Salad, Bread, Fondu,
Beverages - Provided

Entertainment following lunch:

Slideshow of France

by David Fessenden

RSVP to Charlotte Clement 625-6270

**Capital Campaign Monthly News -
February 2018
First Congregational Church UCC
of Ashfield**

2018

On Sunday February 11 at 12:00 noon (following the 10:00 a.m. worship service and coffee hour) there will be a special presentation about organ pipe decoration by Marylou Davis of Woodstock, CT. Everyone in the congregation and general community is invited to attend.

Marylou Davis is a highly respected historic conservator, whose work is hardly limited to organ pipes. It was Ms Davis whose research produced the correct wallpaper replication for Emily Dickinson's bedroom at the Dickinson Homestead in Amherst. No longer do visitors see plain, brownish walls in the room where the famous poet wrote. Rather, one sees cheerful pink flowered wallpaper which Ms Davis was able to reproduce from nineteenth century fragments discovered above the room's ceiling less than a decade ago.

The Capital Campaign at First Congregational Church covers every aspect of organ restoration except decoration of the 33 façade pipes. It is clear from church photographs taken in the 1930s that the thirty-three pipes have been covered with gold paint since at least that time. When the organ was built by George Reed in 1903, the pipes were decorated according to the fashion of the day, with bands of colors and decorative motifs. We are fortunate to be able to see much of the original decoration which still remains on the reverse sides of the pipes. All are welcome to attend what promises to be an interesting, informative and enjoyable session.

Margery Heins and Susannah Lee
Capital Campaign Publicity

This is a year of change, transformation, bravery and magic.

In this moment we are being asked to make choices about who we are and how we are.

To take risks to love, even when and especially when it hurts.

To be open and to be humble.

To invest in our local communities and to build home, inside of ourselves, and with people who mirror to us divinity, and who are committed to embodying the radical imagination.

To create the fellowships we crave.

This is a year of being guided by the universe/ God/Allah/spirit.

To surrender to her/their love for us and trust in the VASTNESS.

To honor the ancestors, the moon cycles and the earth--a dedication we make as we journey towards returning to connection.

This is a year of sustainability. To attend to foundations because this is how we will thrive and blossom and become the world/we, that's needed.

A year to commit to structures that catalyze magic.

This is a year of taking time, to do less and to be more. To be more fully broken, to be more fully alive, to be more ourselves--past fear and doubt and stand in the sun as it sparkles upon us welcoming us home.

---by Jardana Peacock, *White awake*

March Madness

(AKA: March Dates to note)

Here's a heads-up for the month of March:

Sat. March 3, Sarah Pirtle has organized a fantastic concert featuring local artists singing the songs of Pete Seeger. The show starts at 7 p.m. with proceeds (free-will donation) going to "Carry it On," a fund carrying on the work of Pete and Toshi Seeger, who inspired us and gave us hope by working tirelessly for peace, social justice, and to protect the earth.

Sponsored by the Mission and Social Justice Committee.

“Together As One”

Tri-Conference Focus Group

– Lee MA -- Jan 22, 2018 by Bruce Bennett

The Annual Meeting of the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ (MACUCC) last June 16-17 was historic in that it was a joint meeting of the Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island Conferences. [Victoria Nelson and I had represented our church as lay delegates at this June 16-17 event.] The purpose of this historic Tri-Conference was for the three conferences to discern whether to move ahead with plans to join “Together, As One,” which the slogan created for the proposed merger.

The decision to move ahead, tentatively, was made at that meeting, and further deliberations have continued ever since. One part of those deliberations was a series of eleven focus groups held throughout the three-state region between January 18 and 23 of this year. I happened to learn about these focus groups through the weekly email newsletter from MACUCC. I signed up to attend the one offered at the Congregational Church in Lee on Jan 22.

They were all facilitated by a man named Jim Schnurbusch from St. Louis, of the firm OrgStory, who had been engaged as a consultant for this process.

There were about 20 people in the Lee church hall on the afternoon of the 22nd. Jim, having facilitated most of the eleven focus groups by then, seemed to be holding up well. He was very pleasant and patient and spoke of how lucky we were in New England to have such beautiful houses of worship.

We were a tough group of Yankees. Most were pastors or retired pastors. Most did not seem to relish the idea of the merger but acknowledged the financial necessity. Some suggested the potential

economies of scale with regard to bulk purchasing. Others envisioned IT support to enable sharing of worship in real time, and more participation in webinars. Some looked forward to enhancement of social justice efforts. One suggested that the conferences, regional and national, may be offering too little support in practical matters and maybe too much in philosophical matters.

Jim invited the group to include in our deliberations a radical reimagining of our conference structures and terminology to describe them. He even invited us to question the use of the term 'conference' itself.

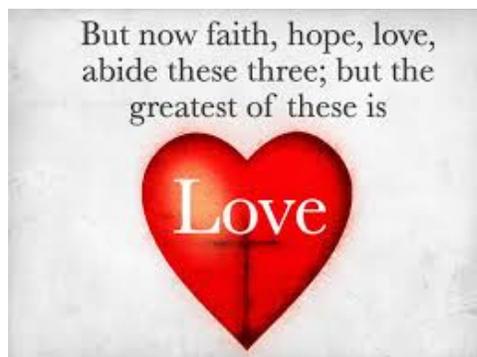
Someone quipped, “Don't let the organization kill the organism.”

Another offered the historical reflection that it turned out to be a good thing when the national UCC packed its bags and moved to Cleveland. Somehow the function of the organization improved with the housecleaning and the remodeling.

Another asked what is to be done with all the comments from this and the other focus group sessions. Will they be used? Jim replied that the responses from all the sessions will be compiled and forwarded to the Tri-Conference transition team for their review. They continue their work on the proposed structure of the new Tri-Conference, and their work will be brought to a vote by each of the three conferences at their annual meetings this summer. It was noted that each of the three conferences would continue to exist with some independent functions even while simultaneously joining together as a regional conference.

One comment from a leader last June has stayed with me. The whole UCC is watching our Tri-Conference efforts closely, especially because we are undertaking this from a position of strength, not weakness. The same might be said of our church during this time of Transition and Re-Envisioning.

Bruce Bennett



INTERIM PRAYER

Loving God, When we are fearful in anyway during this interim process, help us to see your mighty power and your grace, help us to hear your spirit calling us, and feel your warm embrace. Let us remember that surely your presence is in this place. Amen

First Congregational Church/UCC
 Box 519
 Ashfield, MA 01330



FEBRUARY 2018

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	
				1 COA luncheon Meal provided France slideshow	2	3
4 communion 10 WORSHIP potluck Envision 2018	5 7 - Deacons Mtg 7 - Trustees Mtg	6	7 9:30 TaiChi 7:15 Choir Rehearsal	8 6 - Potluck 7 - Missions and Social Justice	9	10 7 pm Hilltown Variety Show
11 10 WORSHIP Sarah Pirtle celebration	12 	13 3-6 Food Pantry 3-6 Share the Warmth	14  9:30 TaiChi Ash Wednesday		16	17
18 1st LENT 10 WORSHIP	19 	20 7 - Bubble Up	21 9:30 TaiChi 7:15 Choir Rehearsal	22	23	24
25 2nd LENT 10 WORSHIP	26	27 3-6 Food Pantry 3-6 Share the Warmth	28 9:30 TaiChi 7:15 Choir Rehearsal			
Feb. 10th Hilltown Variety Show 7pm						