



The Spire

The Newsletter of the Wollaston Congregational Church, United Church of Christ

Pastor's Page

February 2010

Dear friends,

Mid-January seems to have become my customary vacation time over these years, and this year was no exception. I traveled to beautiful St. Thomas the first week of vacation and Mark and I enjoyed smooth plane rides there and back again, plenty of sunshine while we swam and snorkeled around the islands, and beautiful sunsets over the beaches most nights. It has also been wonderful to have a second week at home to get caught up on household stuff as I prepare for the coming months at our church.



So soon after Christmas and Epiphany, it seems a bit out of sync that I'm already thinking about Easter, but, as you know, the liturgical calendar guides us from one season in Christ's life to the next year after year. Before I move too quickly into Lent and Easter, let me invite you to pause and reflect on the past year of our church life together.

Our worship services, combining both tradition and innovation, our solid Christian education programs, our increased stewardship, and further building repair and renovation development, as well as the exceptional mission activities of our members all give us so many reasons to feel good and confident about the future of our church. I am reminded of the story between Moses and Joshua. Although Moses led the Israelites to the Promised Land, he never entered it. He was only shown glimpses of it. Joshua, Moses' successor, was the one who helped the people settle their new homeland. It was Joshua's call from God to organize the people, to help them develop governance, divide the land, and establish worship spaces for God. This was no easy task, as this new generation had been raised among those who wandered in the desert with Moses for forty years. They had only known a nomadic life, so settling was new to them.

Our congregation is made up of long-term members, and those who have become a part of our community of faith over the last six years, coming together to worship God. Many who are still newer have heard about the sense of wandering in the desert that was experienced amongst our congregation in years gone by.

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You have all entered a time of Joshua ministry in which it is this generation of worshippers who are called to establish new governance, divide the tasks, and establish worship spaces for God in this new church and in our lives. May this year ahead be one in which we prosper together through all of the seasons.

Blessings,



Women's Prayer Breakfast



Saturday, March 13

For the past 12 years women of faith from across the South Shore have gathered each spring for a wonderful morning of prayer, music, and fellowship. Our guest speaker is Linda Erickson, former regional President for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saint's Relief Society. She will address this year's theme of "Women Making a Difference through Faith, Hope and Charity."

The event takes place at St. Ann's Social Hall. Registration begins at 8:30am and breakfast is served at 9:00 am.

Breakfast will include: eggs, homefries, sausages, ham, Danishes, bagels, muffins, croissants, juice, coffee and tea.

Cost per ticket is \$12 For tickets call 617-773-6203 or visit www.interfaithsocialservices.org



Our Annual Meeting

Sunday, January 24

The meeting was the culmination of a special Sunday where, during worship, Kendra Donovan presented the story of her mission trip to Guatemala and her plans for a mission trip during February to help in Haiti. We are so proud of her.

At the meeting following worship, the Congregation voted to accept a deficit budget for 2010 with the expectation that the Stewards will work towards finding ways for funding, or generating cash to offset this. New Stewards, officers and deacons were elected. All positions elected were for a single year only and some of the positions were re-elected to the same position to provide continuity in a second year of transition in church government.

A three-month sabbatical was approved for Rev. Dr. Gifford during the summer and the Deacons, Stewards and Church Staff will be working together to ensure appropriate pastoral coverage and care during that time.

Peter Johnston reported on the "state of the building", Kim Kroeger presented a report on the plans for the pastor's sabbatical, Lisa Hellmuth reported on the work of the Stewards in 2009 and plans to move forward in 2010, and Marian Channon presented the budget. Dr. Gifford led us in prayer, and installed the newly elected leaders.



From Leanne Walt

Dear Friends,

On Sunday, January 17th, a group of us met after worship to discuss and learn more about the United Church of Christ (UCC). We began by sharing a bit of our own religious background; by talking about what denomination, if any, we were raised in and how much we knew about the UCC. Questions came up surrounding Unitarian Universalist (UU) history and beliefs and the theological and historical differences between the UCC and Congregational churches. We also touched upon the similarities and differences between our church and the Roman Catholic Church.

The United Church of Christ formed in Cleveland, Ohio in 1957 when the Evangelical and Reformed Churches merged with the Congregational Christian Churches. The theology and spirit of the UCC can be summarized in part by the key characteristics of the religious traditions that formed our union: *Christian, Reformed, Congregational, Evangelical*.

- ***Christian.*** Through our name, the United Church of Christ, we proclaim that we are a part of the Body of Christ, the Christian Church. We follow in the witness of the early disciples, testifying to the reality and power of the crucified and risen Christ, Jesus of Nazareth.
- ***Reformed.*** As a part of the Protestant tradition, we believe in the primacy of the Scriptures, the doctrine of justification by faith alone, and the priesthood of all believers. We celebrate two sacraments: baptism and the Lord's Supper (also called Holy Communion or the Eucharist).
- ***Congregational.*** The basic unit of the United Church of Christ is the local congregation. Members of each congregation covenant with God and with one another to form larger structures for more effective work. Our covenanting emphasizes trustful relationships rather than legal agreements.
- ***Evangelical.*** The primary task of the church is to proclaim, through word and deed, the Gospel or (in Greek) *evangel*.

I invite you to think about how these characteristics may be similar to or different from your own religious background and which of these characteristics have drawn you to the UCC. Let's continue the conversation on how these four strands of the UCC come together at WollyCong and how we can better represent them both within and beyond our own community of faith!

Peace,
Leanne

From Peter Johnston



Note: On the first Sunday of each month, the I lead the communion worship service at the Eventide Home. I preached this sermon on Sunday, January 3, and it is reprinted here by request.

A couple of Saturdays ago, I was at the church at about 3 in the afternoon. It was the dress rehearsal for the children's annual Christmas pageant. The pageant is the classic Christian Christmas ritual. It generally involves the children of the church coming together to act out the story of the birth of the child, Jesus Christ long ago in the city of Bethlehem.

My involvement in Christmas pageants has changed over the years and I now participate as the organist without a costume or a gift or a camel, playing various carols which the cast and congregation sing between the scenes. This, I just found out, is called "interstitial music." Most often there is a grand procession of the characters during the singing of "O Come All Ye Faithful."

Pageants generally begin with the annunciation, when the angel of the lord comes to a teenager, Mary, and announces that she will be the mother of the savior Christ the Lord.

Sometimes a narrator will begin "In those days, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world was to be enrolled."

After the carol "O Little Town of Bethlehem" we open to a scene of shepherds, clad in robes

and wearing dishtowels on their heads.

The narrator intones "There were shepherds abiding in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night."

At this dress rehearsal, there was a photographer from the local newspaper. After our first run through in the sanctuary, we all tromped upstairs to the parish hall to get the kids into their costumes. I was handed a pile of costumes and given charge over the shepherds, which were to abide in the fields. Each shepherd had a hood and cloak, a staff, and a piece of cloth, called a *keffiyeh*, which is fastened to the head by a doubled up band of cord, an *igal*. I know about these things.

A little shepherd, age five, felt it necessary to tell me how to attach his headpiece. I thought to myself "*Listen kid, this is my 40th Christmas pageant. I started out as an infant, playing the baby Jesus; I've been a king, a shepherd, an angel, a narrator, and even God. I don't need to be told by a five year old how to dress a shepherd in a dish towel!*"

This moment was captured on film, but thankfully not published in the *Ledger*.

As it turned out, we didn't have the Christmas pageant. There was a terrific snowstorm, and the churches in the city cancelled their morning services. And we went through Christmas without hearing the children tell the story.

This whole experience, the children telling and retelling in scripture, costume and song, got me thinking about a conversation I had a last year, with an atheist. It was at a New Year's Eve party in Boston.

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I've never been what you might call an *evangelical Christian*. I've been known to tell my own faith stories, but never strong armed anyone into believing in God, or threatened them with eternal damnation. When my faith is called into question, my modus operandi is to skulk away from the people I'm talking with, and then pray behind their backs that they will eventually see the light without any intervention from me. I tell you this so that you'll understand a conversation between me and a zealous atheist wasn't going to win any awards from any debating society.

But there I was in the kitchen of a loft in East Boston, on New Year's Eve, with a tipsy atheist, who, upon finding out that I was a Christian, and worse yet a *professional* Christian, set forth on a harangue, which decried me a fool, for believing in the preposterous stories of the resurrection and the virgin birth, and God and Jesus Christ, and Jonah, and Moses, and Paul and Silas and Noah, Miriam and Bathsheba and all those other guys. This was followed by waves of condescending language about organized religion, which she then accused me of being wholly responsible for. Along with the poisoning young minds.

Fortunately, our host was within earshot and came and rescued me. See how prayer works?

But I had to sit down and have a long hard think about it. Did I actually believe in the virgin birth, precisely as it is told in scripture? I do believe in God, and in the power of prayer. And I've seen God working through people's lives, and in their deaths, and throughout my own life.

But *do I* believe in the *all* the stories of the bible? *Do I* believe in a god who created the world in 7 days, got mad and flooded it? In the end, I had to answer Yes! And then No! and then "I don't know!" Because, some of the stories contradict each other, some can be explained by better science, and they were, after all, written down and translated from Aramaic to Latin to Greek, to German and English many times by mere mortals.

But here's the question: "*Even if we don't believe all of them, What would life be like without these stories?*" I can't imagine it. The bible is full of stories, rules, parables, commandments, threats, morality tales, psalms, laws, aphorisms, advice, recipes and

miracles. *How could a child figure out if there is a god if they've never been to church, and never heard the stories?* We used to tell them in public schools, and children learned all of the carols, and the bible stories, and there were Christmas Concerts, not winter arts festivals

And so *we* teach the stories. Every week of every year, September-June, our Sunday school teachers gather with their classes, and our pastors

meet with our confirmands. And every week in church, through scripture, song and sermon we listen to and interpret the stories of the bible, chapter and verse. It takes about three years, and then we do it all over again...

So this morning, we finally held the Christmas Pageant. I watched with particular joy as our shepherds shouted in unison "Let's go to Bethlehem!" retelling one of the oldest and most important moments in the life of the infant Jesus.

"Even if we don't believe all of them, What would life be like without these stories?"

Dear Church Family,

Thank you all for the Christian love and support I have received over the last year, particularly this past month with the death of my mother. I have shared laughter and tears with you all. You have laughed, listened and cried with me. I have been blessed by feeling God work in and through each of you. Thank you for your cards, prayers and nourishment's. Wishing you all the joy of experiencing Gods love in 2010.

Marge Schwendenman and Family

Thank You!



January's lessons helped our children get to know Jesus in a more human way - as a boy, as a son - but He knew so much more was waiting for Him.

February's Lessons

Our Sunday School curriculum in February continues following Jesus' journey as we enter into the celebration of Lent.

These are just a few of the topics the children will read and learn about this month:

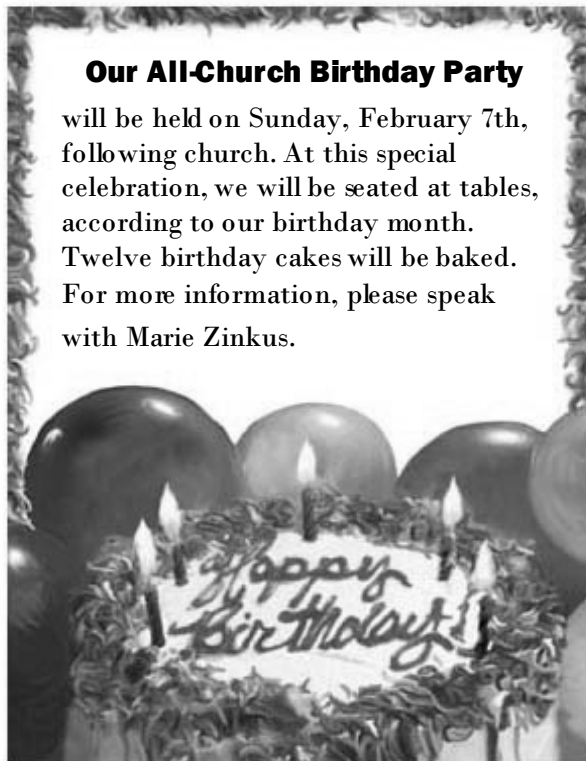
The Disciples - who were they and why did Jesus need them? Are we disciples too?

Many of Jesus' healing miracles; and

Not everyone accepted and welcomed Jesus

These and other stories will help prepare the children to better understand the events that will occur during Lent, Palm Sunday and Easter.

And if you haven't seen it, look at the bulletin board near the Church Office - it contains drawings done by the Sunday School children when asked to draw that "Jesus is the Light of the World".



Our All-Church Birthday Party

will be held on Sunday, February 7th, following church. At this special celebration, we will be seated at tables, according to our birthday month. Twelve birthday cakes will be baked. For more information, please speak with Marie Zinkus.



Moderator

It is a well know fact in church growth that people come to church because they were invited by someone involved in that congrega-

tion. It is also true that sometimes people who are invited to visit a church go on to other churches with a strong faith and mission. The following story was told to me by Ellis Laycock, one of our long-time members, and each year in January I have meant to share it with others.

In the early 1950's, Wollaston Congregational Church had a youth director who was studying at Boston University. There she had met a young man who was doing graduate work at BU. She invited him to come to church with her one Sunday. He visited the Sunday School classes, attended worship and joined in the fellowship and activities of the church that day.

At a later meeting at the church, the youth director reported on the visit of this young man. She said that he wouldn't be coming back to this church as he had other places to go and be part of their worship and mission. She also said that this young man was someone very special, had a deep love of God and a strong sense of mission. She indicated that this young man would take this sense of mission and justice to a level that would reach thousands throughout the country. That young man who spent a Sunday here in Wollaston while a student is better known to us now as Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.!

You never know what can result when you invite someone to come to church with you, or tell your friends and neighbors of the many wonderful opportunities for worship and mission that can be found at Wollaston Congregational Church. -Marian Channon



5th Annual Healthy Kids Vacation Camp

It will be an "Olympic Experience" for campers joining us on February 16th-18th.

While celebrating the Winter Olympics occurring in Vancouver, our campers will be learning some cool hip hop dance moves, basic physical exercise routines, and making some delicious healthy snacks.

The camp concludes on Thursday with a performance by the children given to family and friends!

If you are interested, please contact the office at 617-773-7432 to see if there are any openings. We have a limit of 75 children.



The Spire is a monthly publication of the Wollaston Congregational Church, United Church of Christ. Copies are available in the narthex.

The deadline for the March newsletter is February 20 at noon.

Submissions should be e-mailed to wollastonadmin@comcast.net, or delivered to Peter Johnston in the church office. Articles may be edited for content and length.



Marie McDonald and Erin McMillen, in lobsterwear, pictured here with Erin's grandparents, on Wollaston Beach for the John Hancock Birthday Plunge.