

THE UNION COURIER

Union Congregational Church
United Church of Christ
The Reverend Gail L. Miller, Pastor

220 Main Street
Groton, Massachusetts 01450



January 2015

FROM THE



PASTOR

Questions! Questions! Questions!

Sometimes I think the questions we ask are as important as the answers we give. This is certainly the case during a Confirmation year, when we explore the Christian faith with our young teens. Each week at the end of class, we give the kids 3x5 notecards to write down any question they have about the faith or the church or the topic we just discussed. Some questions come around week after week, with a different spin or angle; others are unique and very specific. All the questions are thoughtful and meaningful.

Then at the beginning of the next class session, we take the first 15-30 minutes answering them. Pete Hnath (who teaches with me) and I volley the questions back and forth, often simply turning the question back to the kids. I love this part of our time together, and I am always eager at the end of the night to read the next set of questions.

I thought it might be nice to share some of these questions and bring some of the spirit of Confirmation class to worship. So on January 4th, rather than a traditional sermon, Pete and I will answer some of the Confirmation questions that we think are also your questions. We'll also invite you to reflect on a "faith resolution" as we enter the new calendar year together.

Pablo Casals (1876-1973) was one of the greatest cello players of all time. He maintained a performing / composing / conducting career late into his old age. At the age of 93 he was asked why he continued to practice the cello three hours a day. He replied, "I'm beginning to notice some improvement."

The Christian community is a community which can never stop learning if it wishes to remain Christian. Jesus did not come among us to teach a set of unchanging, absolute religious propositions. If that had been his purpose, then Christianity would be a relatively simple matter of learning doctrines - like memorizing multiplication tables or Latin noun declensions. There's a bit of work involved, but it is possible to master the material.

But one can never master the material involved in these words of Jesus: *Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it* (Matt. 10:39). We can only hear and struggle with them. And get together with others who also struggle with them! And so, we are offering an opportunity to do just that. If you are available on Fridays in the late morning, come check this out:

Confirmation for Adults or Christianity 101 (Pastor Miller teaching)
Four Fridays, 9:30—11:15am, Fellowship Hall

Jan. 9: The Bible, Creation

Jan. 16: The Trinity: God, Jesus, Holy Spirit

Jan. 23: Worship and the Sacraments (Baptism, Holy Communion)

Jan. 30: either Church History/Our Church History

OR The Christian Life: I Believe & I Promise.

Come for warm fellowship, tasty treats, funny videos (on topic of course!), lively discussion, support and prayer. Come grow in faith and friendship. **Childcare will be provided.**

...and speaking of Confirmation, check out the
picture on page 8!



Our Church Family



Ongoing Prayer List

Our Ongoing Prayer List: (These names are prayed out loud at Open Sanctuary Time each Wednesday.)

Jim Breault
Marlene Byron

Janet Luttrell
Leigh Mezzetti

Holly Norton
Joe Swales

Erin Tucker

This list has been refreshed as of January 1, 2015 (requests received after November 15 have been included here). If you would like to add a name to the list, please notify Gail Miller or Carol Zaiatz (978-448-2091 or unioncc@uccgroton.org).



Confidential Prayer Chain

Need prayer and need it now?

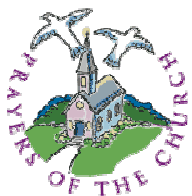
Simply email prayer@uccgroton.org and your request will go to the confidential pray-ers; or call Lori McElroy () and she will put your prayer request in motion for you. Prayer requests are held in confidence among those who are praying for you, and you may request that your name be withheld.



In Appreciation



Thank you to the Groton Woman's Club for the Christmas wreaths on the front door and the greens in the flower pots. These were donated in appreciation for the use of the church for their meetings throughout the year and a workshop for the Greens Sale.



- Jesse Smith, Liz Smith's brother, recovering from a heart attack.
- All who mourn the death of Julie Maillet, especially her daughter Bridgette, and friend Anne Cahill.
- Carol Hess (a friend of Marvin Caldwell), recovering from surgery for breast cancer.
- Paul Brown, recovering from heart surgery.
- GPS Task Force/Vision Team as they discern God's will for our church.
- Family and friends of Martha Morse, who died in December.
- Bob and Ellen Hargraves, in the sudden death of Bob's brother-in-law, Dick Catalini, on December 23.

January Birthdays

Peg DeBruyn	01/01	Casey Sjoberg	01/12	Bill Shute	01/21
Madeleine Bugbee	01/02	Andrea McDonough	01/14	Toni Bond	01/24
Chris Sullivan	01/03	Abby Burgess	01/14	Taryn Emerle	01/27
Marvin Caldwell	01/05	Barbara Wyman	01/15	Katie Scheve	01/28
Bonnie Marchesani	01/06	Matthew Plausse	01/17	Neil Dooney	01/29
Emma Milano	01/09	Reverend Skip Lloyd	01/18	Lucille Murrell-Edmunds	01/29
Gordon Platt	01/09	Catherine Daly	01/19	Gary Emerle	01/30
Megan Mahony	01/11	Alison Rosenfeld	01/19	Bruce Wyman	01/30

If we missed your birthday, it is not in our database. Please email unioncc@uccgroton.org to give us your birthday. Also, we would like to recognize significant anniversaries — would you share that information with us?

The Birthday Fund

This is a fun way to contribute above and beyond your regular giving to the church to something above and beyond our normal operating budget. Simply make a donation on (or around) your birthday in the amount of your age (Memo: Birthday Fund)! Did your kids receive birthday money from Grandma and Grandpa? Consider having them share with the church \$5 or \$10 or \$15! If everyone participates, this will add up to a significant amount. The Church Council and the Finance people will work out the details around deciding what the Birthday Fund Gift will be each year. We are grateful to Helen Misselhorn for planting the seed of this idea at her 90th birthday celebration at church in October. Let's join her and watch our gifts grow!

Birthday Fund to date: \$516.

Church News



Birth Announcement

Mackenzie Elizabeth Roy was born on December 11, 2014. Mackenzie is the great-granddaughter of Leon and Barbara Avey. Congratulations!



February Courier

Please submit items for the February Courier by Friday, January 16, in order to be sure they get into this issue. All

submissions to the Courier should be emailed to Carol Zaiatz at unioncc@uccgroton.org. Thank you.

Annual Report



The Annual Report will be available on the tables at the back of the Sanctuary on **Sunday, January 18**, two weeks prior to the Annual Meeting (February 2). It includes a revised balanced budget for your consideration.



Annual Meeting Sunday, February 1 After Worship

The Annual Meeting will be held on Sunday, February 1, in the Sanctuary immediately following Worship. All are encouraged to attend (especially church members)! We will go over the

Annual Report, approve nominations for Committees and Ministries, and approve the 2015 Budget. We will also hear a report from the Endowment Committee and discuss any other business that may come before us.

—Stefanie Lempp, Moderator

Church Council Meeting Summary December 17

The 2014 budget is coming in at \$2K budgeted net.

The 2015 budget is being adjusted; 90 pledges have come in which constitute 89% of the estimated pledge income for our 2015 Operating Budget. The budget will be voted on at the February 1 Annual Meeting and will be available at the back of the Sanctuary or in the Church Office January 18.

There was a discussion on conducting all-church meetings without Robert's Rules. It appears that most do not like Robert's Rules, some votes are necessary and there must be a clear decision-making procedure. The Townsend Congregational Church does not use Robert's Rules; they will be meeting with us in January; watch the announcements for further details. Please contact Rev. Gail or Stefanie Lempp with comments.

A Season of Discernment

At the Congregational meeting in November, we began experimenting with conducting church business in a way that is:

- more Christ centered,
- which invites every voice in the room to be heard,
- and seeks agreement rather than winners and losers.

Knowing that this is a process to be developed over time, we are eager to hear your thoughts in a couple of forums.

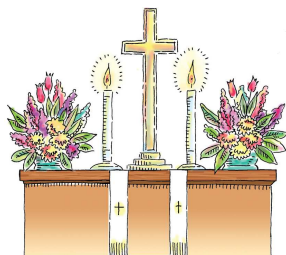
Sunday, January 4, in the Parlor after Worship

Wednesday, January 21, 7:30 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall

At the gathering on the 21st we have also invited the Moderator and a couple others from the UCC Church in Townsend, which has shifted away from meetings governed by Robert's Rules to a Discernment Model. They will share with us why and how they made this change, as well as what it actually looks like in the life of their church. And of course they will answer any questions we may have. This will be a valuable opportunity. Please plan to attend one or both events so that we may hear from you and so we can learn together, while we discern what God wants for our church.

Sunday Worship in the event of a storm....

If weather should impede your ability to get to church, know that you are freely released from any responsibilities you had - whether for Sunday School, Choir, worship leading, Fellowship Hour. We will worship as we can with whomever we've got - adjusting the service accordingly and making decisions in real time. If church is cancelled, it will be posted on our website by 8:00 a.m. that morning.



Altar Flowers

2015 Altar Flowers

We have a "standing order" with Country Florist in Pepperell. They deliver a center arrangement to the altar on Saturday every week. If you would like to dedicate flowers on a particular Sunday, please: 1) Fill in your name and dedication on the 2015 Flower Chart in the church hall (so that Carol can include this in the bulletin); 2) send a check for \$25 (made out to the UCC; memo: Altar Flowers) to the church office (220 Main Street, Groton, MA 01450). The church will pay the bill to Country Florist. You don't need to call Lisa at Country Florist (978-433-8974) unless you want to change the arrangement to two bouquets (she'll let you know the cost increase) or to request a particular color or design. Call Carol in the office with your questions (978-448-2091).

GPS (God's Purpose Seekers) Update

Pete Hnath is one of the eight serving on this task force, which has been charged with (among other things) answering these questions: Who are we? And what is God calling us to do? Pete reflects on where we're at as we turn the page into 2015.

Those who know me would agree that patience is not a strength of mine. I like to "see a problem, fix a problem." Learning to operate on God's time has been an unanticipated (and sometimes challenging) blessing of my time with the God's Purpose Seekers (GPS) Task Force. It's now evident to me that the Spirit has been persistently and patiently working through each of us to discern a common understanding of what God is calling Union Congregational Church to be.

Over the past two months the GPS has completed our review of the exceptional book "What's Theology Got to Do With It?", the final three chapters of which focused our attention on the sacraments, the "end times" and the Pastor's role as teacher. We also spent time reviewing the church's 20 year worship attendance history and discussing the principles of facilitating change.

As the Spirit has built consensus within our eight-person team, it's allowed us to begin to transition from reflection to documentation of what we believe God is saying to us. We have a team retreat planned for early January during which we'll be working to synthesize God's vision and to outline recommendations. Our goal is to have a substantive update to share with the congregation by early Spring. We ask for your continued prayer and welcome your input and your questions.

In Christ,

Pete Hnath (on behalf of the GPS team)

GPS Task Force

—Bonnie Biocchi
—Pete Hnath
—Halsey Platt

—Tim Dumont
—Stefanie Lempp
—Larry Robinson

—Mary Hanson
—Gail Miller

Stewardship



Stewardship 2015: Be Inspired—Share the Joy

The Stewardship Team thanks all those who pledged for 2015.

As of December 21st, we have received 91% of our goal with 93 pledges in hand.

New this year was asking you to find your *joyful number*, and by doing so we hope that you will draw closer to God "who loves a cheerful giver" (I Cor 7:9). We have also been on a journey to become more comfortable talking about money in general and our giving to the church. We've read books together, enjoyed small group discussion gatherings, invited prayerful support of our work, and had many individual conversations with you throughout the past year.

And so, in that vein, we want to share with you reflections from some of the CHEERFUL GIVERS in our church:

- *My joyful number stayed the same for 2015 because I retired in 2014. Originally, I considered lowering my pledge but that did not feel right. Giving to God and the church is extremely important to me and does provide great joy. I do have faith that God will provide and will give me the wisdom to manage the budget so that I can fulfill this joyous commitment.*
- *Our joyful number for 2015 was a decrease because we have increased our pledge to our old church that is having financial difficulty.*
- *Our joyful number stayed the same for 2015 because we are anticipating a possible decrease in our income. Keeping the number the same will therefore be an "increase" in our giving from the perspective of our household. We feel good knowing that we are NOT decreasing our giving to the church, though our income may go down. We also know that we can increase our pledge mid-year if our income doesn't decrease.*
- *My joyful pledge decreased because I realized I was not giving joyfully to the church. Two years ago I increased my pledge beyond what was truly sustainable. To fulfill this pledge I stopped giving to organizations that were important to me. I try to balance my giving, which runs between 15 and 20% of my limited income, between the church, social justice, and conservation organizations. Saying "No" to these other groups was painful. I appreciate the growth in spirit and member led activities at Union Congregational and want to support that. To accomplish all this I have decreased my pledge to the church in order to give to others.*
- *My joyful number for 2015 increased because it's a joy and a privilege to be able to do so. I believe everything I have comes from God. It's important to me to give back.*
- *Our joyful number for 2015 is an increase from last year because we continue to be blessed by God's abundant gifts in our lives: family and friends, church community and faith building, and good health, to name just a few! We have so much more than what could be considered "daily needs" and giving to the church is one way to celebrate this Joy.*
- *Our joyful number for 2015 increased because we feel blessed and wanted to share that good feeling with the church.*

We would love to hear your thoughts as well. Feel free to complete the sentence "My joyful number increased / decreased / stayed the same because..." and share it with Bob (Collector) at

. We would love to have another article in a future Courier with more reflections from YOU. (No names will be used.) Sharing is good. Sharing WHY we share is also good. Living a God-pleasing life is always good.

Always moving forward.

Your Stewardship Team
Bob Goudey, Liz McQuillin, Gail Miller, Halsey Platt, and Craig Smith

Sunday School News



Teacher Training Session

Sunday, January 11, after worship

At this session you will experience a class with the CE leaders being the teacher and you being the students. We will also provide an overview of the curriculum, a link to the online curriculum, and a question/answer session.

Christian Education Committee

—Anne Cahill, Chair

—Jean Armstrong

—Dena Hance

—Diane Landry

Bible Study

Wednesday Evening Bible Study

7:30 p.m. in the Pastor's Office

Wednesday Evening Bible Study will resume on January 7. Habakkuk, Job, and the psalmist have messages of hope in time of trouble. They "all affirm that - no matter what calamities might come their way - they will trust God, rejoice in God's presence in their lives, and praise God for the strength to carry on." As their messages continue, they remind us that God constantly "sends forth steadfast love to all people." *Contact Janet Kennedy if you are interested in joining.*

Thursday Morning Bible Study

10:00 a.m. at 26 Court Street

Epiphany is the season between Christmas and Lent. The Season of Epiphany centers on the showing forth, the manifestation of God in the world. We each can have our own personal epiphanies that may or may not involve God. This Epiphany Season we will focus on God in the world and among various peoples.

Jan 8 Matthew 2:1-12 The Three Kings

Jan 15 Luke 2:1-20 The nativity of Jesus, esp the shepherds

Jan 22 Luke 2:21-40 Jesus' circumcision, naming and the visits of Simeon and Anna

Jan 29 Luke 2: 41-52 12 year old Jesus in the Temple

Feb 5 Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:19-34 The Baptism of Jesus

Join us for often deep conversation, hot beverages and cookies. *Contact Marvin Caldwell ()*

Cookies 'N' Carols / Family Ministry / Missions



Cookies 'N' Carols

On Sunday afternoon, December 7, 30 people (of all ages) sang and delivered 47 plates of cookies.

It was a joyful experience, as we shared more than cookies and carols; we shared God's love!

A sincere thank you to the cookie bakers, singers and helpers who participated in this wonderful event. We made \$375.00 toward the Youth Mission Trip this coming summer.

—Julie Platt and Anne Cahill



Family Ministry



Let's Go Sledding

Family Ministry Sledding

Sunday, January 25

2:00 — 4:00 p.m.

Let it Snow, Let it Snow, Let it Snow.... Weather permitting (snow, snow, snow), we will meet behind the library to go sledding and have hot cocoa. Bring your sleds! Drop by anytime between 2:00 and 4:00 p.m. for some family sledding fun! All ages welcome! If you have questions, contact Corissa and Larry Robinson at 508-333-7040 (cell).

Family Ministry Skiing at Crotched Mountain Resort

On Sundays from 2:00-5:00 p.m., it's family ski time at Crotched Mountain! The area offers discounted lift tickets, discounted rentals, and free ski tips. It would be great to get a group together to enjoy an afternoon of skiing. Contact Corissa Robinson (508-333-7040 or rissie17@gmail.com) to let her know if you are interested and she will coordinate a date (or perhaps dates!).



Missions

Thank You, Thank You, Thank you...



Tewksbury Hospital patients — our gifts are the primary element of their Christmas celebrations, making our support so much more important and valued. Thank you to everyone who donated and helped wrap the gifts. We especially thank Cassie Sampas for organizing this mission effort.

Groton Community Dinner January 30 — Our Turn to Serve

The menu is chili, corn bread, and cake. If you are interested in helping with set-up or clean-up, cooking or donating food, sign-up at the Missions table in the Fellowship Hall. (This dinner will be the one dinner that our Church will be responsible for organizing in 2015.) If you have any questions, contact anyone from the Missions Committee.

Missions Committee

—Janet Kennedy, Chair
—Janice Flynn

—Tony DiCenzo
—Larry Robinson

Youth Ministry

Middle School Ministry Winter Retreat January 23-25 in Hill, NH (near Ragged Mt.)



When: Jan. 23 - 25 (Fri. - Sunday)
Where: Hill, NH (near Ragged Mt.)
Who: Middle School youth (grades 5-8) with or without their parents
Cost (includes food/lodging; ski lift tickets are on your own):
\$30 / person
\$50 / family of 2
\$75 / family of 3 or more
(Checks to UCC; memo: MSM Winter Retreat)

What: Time away with your church friends.
The hospitality of the Houde family.
A charming house in the country.
Skiing at nearby Ragged Mt.
Relaxing with a good book.
Walks in the New Hampshire countryside.



Our Charming Retreat House!

RSVP to Gail at church or Heather Houde () by Tuesday, January 20, so we can plan for food and transportation. After you've signed up you'll receive a packing list and details for the weekend.



Can you find Reverend Gail in this Confirmation picture?

First Congregational Church
Wauwatosa, WI
1979

Just So You Know

Union Congregational Church

United Church of Christ

220 Main Street
Groton, Massachusetts 01450
978-448-2091
www.uccgroton.org

The Reverend Gail Miller

Cell phone: 978-877-2177

gail@uccgroton.org

Fall Office Hours

Tuesday: 9:00 a.m.—5:00 p.m.

Wednesday*: 2:00 p.m.—5:00 p.m.

Thursday—Friday: 9:00 a.m.—5:00 p.m.

*available by cell phone or email in the morning

Carol Zaiatz—Office Administrator

unioncc@uccgroton.org

Office Hours

Tuesday — Friday

8:00 a.m. — 3:00 p.m.

(Church Office is closed on Mondays)

Music Director: Bernard Crane

Cherub Choir: Bonnie Marchesani

Handbell Choir: Cheryl Townsend

Church Officers

Moderator: Stefanie Lempp

Treasurer: Kelli Hnath

Clerk: Lori McElroy

Collector: Bob Goudey

January Deacons

Andrea McDonough/Tim Dumont

Prayer List

Feel free to call the church office to add or remove names from the prayer list.

Booking Events

When planning meetings, please call the church office to be sure the space is available.

Sermons

Copies of Pastor Miller's sermons are available on the website.

Weekly News Email

Gail prepares the email to be sent from the Office Administrator's account, usually on Fridays.

Name Tags help us become friends. Please wear yours. Sign up on the nametag list on the small table in the vestibule, call or email the church office. You can use one of the blank name tags in the basket on the table until yours is ready.

Committee Chairs

Buildings & Grounds Committee:

Jeff Kubick

Christian Education Committee:

Anne Cahill

Church Council Member-at-Large:

John Gervais

Diaconate Committee:

Tim Dumont

Endowment Committee:

Lorrie Morgan

Missions Committee:

Janet Kennedy

Music Committee:

Sheila Mitchell

Pastor Parish Relations Committee:

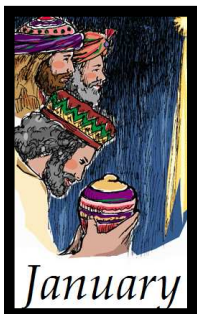
Bebe Goudey

Stewardship & Finance Committee:

Liz Smith

Union Congregational Church
United Church of Christ
220 Main Street
Groton, MA 01450

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January 4- Epiphany When the wise men arrive with their gifts for Jesus

Holy Communion

Question and Answers Sermon with Gail Miller and Pete Hnath

Season of Discernment discussion after worship (see p. 4)



January 9, 16, 23, and 30

Fridays in January—Confirmation for Adults (see p. 1)

January 11

Sunday School Teacher Training after worship (see p. 6)

January 18

Annual Report and Updated 2015 Budget available in Sanctuary or Church Office



January 23—25

Middle School Ministry Winter Retreat (see p. 8)

January 25

Family Ministry Sledding at 2:00 p.m. (see p. 7)