

THE UNION COURIER

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

220 Main Street
Groton, Massachusetts 01450



January 2018

FROM THE



PASTOR

Dear Congregation,

Within the first few weeks of the new year, we always gather for our Annual Congregational Meeting. At Congregational Meetings we seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit and an experience of our unity in Christ as His Body, as we conduct the business of the church.

It is the culmination of a process, which has engaged the stakeholders in the decisions, has considered as many perspectives as possible, and has explored alternatives and possibilities. When an item or topic arrives at the meeting, it's because we have run it around all the committees and people who are impacted and have figured out the best option to pursue.

The purpose of Congregational Meetings is to formally affirm what has already been discerned by the congregation.

Congregational meetings are NOT the place for surprises or drama. The meetings and conversations leading up to the formal vote is where the surprises and drama should occur.

Our tradition places so much (too much?) weight on the up or down / black or white / go or no go moment of voting, so that when we gather for formal decisions (especially for big decisions) there are often tensions and fears in the room that are perhaps beyond proportion to the issue at hand. I've seen this in every church I've served; and I've seen Congregational Meetings become settings for hurt and division, which is not what Jesus Christ wants for his church.

I do not believe this is a healthy approach for our congregation, or any congregation. In my previous church there was a parishioner who believed that Congregational Meetings SHOULD be the place where we "fight" (he used that word) it out. No - just no. How can that be good for the body of Christ? A fight where the required outcome is a formal VOTE? That's the worst time to take a vote — when tensions are high and disagreements are heated.

The Congregational Way seeks the guidance of the Holy Spirit at all times and in all matters. The Holy Spirit doesn't wait for January 28 or June 4 or November 19 to reveal to us our next steps. We are — and should be — **constantly** gathering, discussing, discovering, disagreeing (yes), discerning, and deciding, such that EVERYONE who is a stakeholder in a particular issue has had a chance to engage in the dialogue. Expecting that to happen in a large group (Congregational Meeting) is unrealistic and, frankly, not fair to the introverts among us. Some people need small group discussions, or one-on-one conversations, to share in the process.

If you want your views to be thoughtfully considered and integrated into the conversation, they need to be heard well before we come to the decision moment. If you feel strongly about something, waiting until the Congregational Meeting to share your thoughts (especially if they are critical) is not a God-pleasing or effective approach. As brothers and sisters in Christ, we do everything we can to build each other up in love and to build up the Body. Seeing the Congregational Meeting as an opportunity for a "gotcha" moment, or a "take a stand" moment, or a "make a statement" moment is not what Christ wants for His Church. Your statements and stands are welcome, to be sure, but at a time when they can be received and integrated into the proposals for consideration. What makes it to the agenda for the meeting should be what we have discerned is right for the whole church.

All that I've said here may not be your experience or understanding of "how the Congregational Church works." But I've been in Congregational Churches my whole life, and served as pastor in them for nearly 25 years, and have seen Congregations at their best and at their worst. And I am convinced that in order to be healthy, faithful, and God-pleasing, we need a different approach to how we make decisions, which engages and involves EVERYONE in the decision-making process, BEFORE the decision moment arrives, not AT the decision moment. When we do this, I believe that the Holy Spirit is guiding us through those conversations, so that the decision moment will be clear by the time we get to it.

(continued on page 2)

The Congregational Way requires of us two things: Trust and Participation.

Trust that God is with us and will reveal His will for us. Trust in those among us who are doing the research and studying the issues and exploring the options.

Participate: We - all of us - need to show up, to ask questions, to learn from others, to share our hopes for us as a church, to offer our time and abilities.

The church is at its healthiest and most faithful when we do both of these: trust and participate.

The Body of Christ, seeking the will of God and the directing of the Holy Spirit, is who we are. The three weeks before us and before the Annual Meeting are an opportunity to do and be just that.

With you on the Way,

Our Church Family

Ongoing Prayer List

Diane Black
Megan Bettison

Kathi Bond
Charlie Elwood
Ellie Kennedy

Joe Marchesani
Myrtle Murphy

Rudi Schmid
Liz Waggoner

This list has been refreshed as of January 1 (requests received after November 1 have been included here). If there is a name you would like to put back on this list or if you would like to add a name, please let Gail Miller or Carol Zaiatz (978-448-2091 or unioncc@uccgroton.org) know.



- Bill Colbert and family, in the death of his mother.
- The Morse family, facing numerous challenges.

January Birthdays

Jack Horsman	01/01	Casey Sjoberg	01/12	Jeff Kubick	01/20
Shauna Morrison	01/01	Lauryn Atkins	01/13	Alison Rosenfeld	01/20
Madeleine Bugbee	01/02	Abby Burgess	01/14	Bill Shute	01/21
Janice Owen	01/03	Andrea McDonough	01/14	Kathleen McKenzie	01/22
Chris Sullivan	01/03	Barbara Wyman	01/15	Toni Bond	01/24
Marvin Caldwell	01/05	John Biocchi	01/17	Taryn Emerle	01/27
Bonnie Marchesani	01/06	Matthew Plausse	01/17	Gary Emerle	01/30
Emma Milano	01/09	Reverend Skip Lloyd	01/18	Wendy Jones	01/30
Gordon Platt	01/09	Catherine Daly	01/19	Bruce Wyman	01/30
Megan Mahony	01/11				

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?

Church News

Church Council Meeting Summary (December 13)

The 2017 budget looks as though it will end the year \$7,600 short.

The GPS (God's Purpose Seekers) has dissolved. They discerned that our mission is "Sharing Christ. Changing lives." Also, they discerned that we need to be more accessible and that includes making our church building more accessible.

The Annual Congregational meeting will be on January 28 after worship. There are several important items on the agenda, including voting on the final 2018 budget and whether to conduct a Capital Campaign. If anyone has questions/comments/concerns about the building project, please contact one of the FaST Team (Rev. Gail, Stefanie Lempp, Julie Platt, Pete Hnath).

On Saturday, January 20 at 5:00 p.m. there will be an "International" Potluck hosted by the Church Council, followed by games and activities (see p. 4).



Ladies' Lunch

The Townsend House (2 Depot St., Townsend)

Friday, January 12

Meet at the church at 11:45 a.m. to carpool

Join your friends from church for lunch (the restaurant varies each month).

All women of the church are invited! If you need a ride, contact Janice Owen or Brenda Semienko.



Annual Meeting

Sunday, January 28, After Worship

All are encouraged to attend (especially church members)! The three main items seeking approval on the agenda are: 1) nominations for Committees and Ministries; 2) the Final 2018 Operating Budget; and 3) a Capital Campaign in service of the proposed Building Project. **Details / content about all three of these, as well as the 2017 Annual Report, will be available beginning January 14 in worship and at the church office.** Contact Stefanie Lempp or Pastor Miller with your questions in advance of the meeting.

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.

Thank You!



Thank you to the **Boy Scouts** for the cross wreaths on the church doors; and to the **Groton Woman's Club** for the wreaths on the Parish House doors (donated in appreciation for the use of the church for their meetings and a workshop for the Greens Sale). They all look beautiful!



Thank you to all who purchased poinsettias for our Sanctuary this Christmas. The Sanctuary looked beautiful — what a wonderful way to add to the celebration of the birth of our Lord!

Church News

Offering Envelopes

Dated weekly offering envelopes are available on the table in the hallway downstairs for everyone who pledged. We also have additional envelopes for anyone else who would like them. If you are interested, please contact Bob Goudey or the church office (unioncc@uccgroton.org; 978-448-2091).



"Around the World" Church Potluck Saturday, January 20

5:00 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall

All are invited to this fun evening at church. We'll have games for all ages and favorite dishes / desserts from around the world. If you can, bring something from your ethnicity of origin or a favorite recipe from another part of the country or the world. (Reminder - we are nut free, and gluten

free dishes are encouraged!) You won't want to miss the fun and games (literally - we'll be playing games)! (And if you're not into games, there's plenty of spectating to be done!) AND there will be door prizes!

To RSVP and/or signup to help or bring something, use the link provided in the Friday email or on our website (www.uccgroton.org).

Questions? Contact anyone on the Church Council: *Stefanie Lempp, Lori McElroy, Bob Goudey, Dennis Carey, Gail Miller, Mary Hanson, John Biocchi, Jean Armstrong, Pat Woods, Cassie Sampas, Bebe Goudey, Julie Platt, Andrea McDonough, Liz McQuillin, Bonnie Marchesani, Bernard Crane*

Church Movie Night

Martin Luther: The Idea that Changed the World

Wednesday, January 24

7:00 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall

Martin Luther was one of the most influential and interesting people of the last millennium. This film portrays the key moments in his story: the massive lightning storm that nearly killed him, the bleak self-punishment of his time in the monastery, the corruption that unleashed his anger, the theological breakthrough that reset Christian thought, his trial before the most powerful man in Europe, the staged kidnapping that helped him escape the death penalty, and his ongoing drive to reform the church.

Fellowship Hour — Everyone Takes a Turn

For a year now, we have been enjoying shared Fellowship Hour — taking turns serving as the kitchen "staff" each week. A schedule is put together by the Kitchen Ministry (two households are assigned to each Sunday), and those who are on the schedule receive it by email, so you can know well in advance when it's your turn. (You will also receive a reminder three weeks prior to your Sunday.) The Kitchen Ministry and Deacons are grateful for the wide support and sharing in this excellent ministry. The first part of the 2018 schedule will be emailed to those participating in the next few months. Fellowship Hour is important to us; and sharing in the work of the church is a way we live our faith.



Altar Flowers

2018 Altar Flowers

The 2018 Altar Flower chart is in the downstairs hallway of the church. Country Florist delivers 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 2018 Flower Chart (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 design (she'll let you know if there is a cost increase). Call Carol (978-448-2091) if you have any questions.

Christian Education



January 7
Jesus' Baptism Mark 1:4-11

January 14
God Calls Samuel 1 Samuel 3:1-20

January 21
Jonah and the Big Fish Jonah 1-4

January 28
Teaching and Healing Mark 1:21-28

Christian Education Committee

—Kelli Hnath, Chair
—Anne Larsen

—Jean Armstrong
—Bonnie Marchesani

—Krista Kubick
—Carl Prestia

Bible Study

Wednesday Evening
7:30 p.m. in the Pastor's Office
Contact: Janet Kennedy

Thursday Morning Bible Study
10:00 a.m. 26 Court Street
Contact: Marvin Caldwell

Missions

Many thanks for all your support in December of *The Giving Tree* and *The Christmas Angels*. We provided gifts for patients at Tewksbury State Hospital, individuals often forgotten and many without family support. Thank you to our team of gift wrappers and to Cassie Sampas for organizing this mission effort. Thank you also for your generous support of the organizations selected to be Christmas Angels.



Hagar's Sisters Missions supported *The Hagar's Sisters* Christmas event with devotionals for the Sisters and white poinsettias for the tables/room. Hagar's Sisters is ending the cycle of domestic abuse through the transforming power of God. The remarkable effectiveness of this Christian program is evidenced in the lives of the "Sisters" (women who have experienced domestic abuse) whom they serve.

Missions Committee

—Julie Platt, Chair
—Lynn Manalo

—Brenda Barker
—Halsey Platt

—Ellen Hargraves

2018 Youth Mission Trip Deadlines

June 24—July 1 Lynn, MA

Middle and High School Youth (Grade 6—12) are invited to serve in mission in Lynn, MA.

Cost: \$300 (scholarship available, contact Gail)

Our **first deadline** is **January 19**, when we need to know who **intends** to join us on this trip.

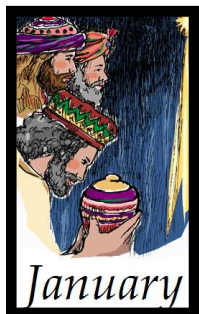
Our **FINAL deadline** is **February 13**, when we need to know who **WILL** be going.

Contact Pastor Miller (978-448-2091 or gail@uccgroton.org) with your questions or to let her know if your son/daughter plans to participate.



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CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED



**DATED MATERIAL
PLEASE DO NOT DELAY**

[] **PLEASE REMOVE ME FROM YOUR MAILING LIST**
Please return to your mail carrier.

January Highlights

Sunday, January 7
Epiphany Sunday/Holy Communion

Friday, January 12—Ladies' Lunch at the Townsend House (see p. 3)

Sunday, January 14
2017 Annual Report and Updated 2018 Operating Budget available in Sanctuary or Church Office

Saturday, January 20
"Around the World" Potluck Dinner at 5:00 p.m. (see p. 4)

Wednesday, January 24
Church Movie Night at 7:00 p.m. (see p. 4)
Martin Luther: The Idea that Changed the World

Sunday, January 28
Annual Meeting after Worship (see p. 3)

