

THE UNION COURIER

Union Congregational Church
United Church of Christ

The Rev. Corey J. Sanderson, Interim Pastor

220 Main Street
Groton, Massachusetts 01450



January 2021



Dear Friends,

The time has come. The moment is near. Preparations are already under way to bid farewell to the terrible onslaught of a year we will forever know as '2020.' What do they say? Hindsight is 2020? Seems about right. As we prepare to welcome a new year, with hopeful signs that 2021 truly will be better, I have been reflecting on what we might learn from this pandemic experience. It's helpful now and then to step back and take in the thirty-thousand-foot view and to see the grand scale of things. So, here are a few thoughts in terms of what we — and churches all around us — have been learning these last nine months. Consider it a 'Top Ten List' of pandemic lessons.

1. The church is not a building. Our church is not our building. We, the people, are the church. The building is simply a tool we use to do our ministry. Sure, we have known this on an intellectual level for many years, but the shutdown has driven this point home in such a way that things are clearer and more pronounced. Ministry, worship, learning, community, mission, care, etc., have all continued on even when the building has been dormant.
2. The church is finally online. Every church is embedded within a particular culture. If the church is not conversant in that culture, it gets left behind. This is something church leaders have been saying for years. We have been living in a T.G.I.F. culture (Twitter, Google, Instagram, and Facebook). Yet now we no longer need to debate the importance of the church being online. Every church is online in some way, shape, or form. Someone much wiser than me said, 'the internet is the church's front door.'
3. Did you know that the earliest churches met in peoples' homes? Long before the great cathedrals, church happened at home. The kitchen table was the altar. Faith formation experts have been telling us that the era of Sunday School is long over. What they mean is that faith formation in our children actually happens at home. Parents are the ones who can best teach their kids about faith. The role of the church, in this shift, is to now help the parents teach their kids.
4. Relationships are everything. This is the easiest one to see, right? You could say the church is in the relationship business. We help people build more loving and faithful relationships with God, with each other, with our neighbors, and even with creation. The world is starved for real authentic relationships. Churches are often quite good at relationships. We have a lot to offer.
5. The downtime and solitude has been good for us. We usually forget that Sabbath rest is a commandment. Jesus went into the society and then back out to solitude. That was his pattern; back and forth, work and rest. Certainly, many people have found these last nine months more stressful, trying to balance remote work and online schooling, but we have never spent more time at home with our families and had our lives simplified in a number of ways.
6. The power of touch is important. Obviously, this means appropriate, professional, socially acceptable kinds of touch that don't make people feel uncomfortable. Handshakes and hugs when greeting friends. A pat on the back and a hand on the shoulder during coffee hour. Even a joking punch in the arm. This is something the digital world can never offer. Do you remember how difficult it was when state and local government asked people to 'stay home and not touch other people'? It's perhaps a bit extreme, but it reminds me of how infants can literally die when they are not held.

Pastor's Page (cont.)

7. We have lived through a time of innovation like we have never seen in all of human history. The church usually evolves in small, slow, and barely noticeable ways. Yet, all of a sudden, we are being asked to travel all these new roads. Just as schools, restaurants, hotels, stores, hospitals, etc., have had to reinvent themselves, so too have churches. Think about how many people used to dread going to work. Now? They are grateful and can't wait to go to work!
8. The church has shifted from being a production to being a producer. In other words, the focus these days is less on 'maintenance' (the actual running of the church through meetings) and more on doing 'ministry' that serves people. Rather than focusing solely on boards and committees, as so many churches do, we can also spend time discerning how we can be supportive of local small businesses, neighborhoods, families, schools, etc. This creates and fosters more empathy and compassion and joy for all people.
9. The Christian faith is once again a 'good' religion. Good stands for 'get out of doors.' Our faith is best lived out in the world. Did you notice how gardening became the hip, cool new trend this past summer? I seem to remember Jesus using nature images of sparrow and lilies. Faith belongs outside, you could say, so we should continue to stay outside.
10. The Holy Spirit brings power, comfort, guidance, and hope. Being so isolated, many people have really opened up in their life and their faith. The Holy Spirit has this uncanny power to unlock the three 'M's — magic, mystery, and miracles. The church can do incredible things when the winds of the Spirit are filling our sails. The way we have run our churches in the past hasn't always been the most faithful or faith-filled way. Less meetings and more ministry makes a difference to everyone. Can we carry this forward? I hope so. Do you remember St. Paul's 'fruits' of the Holy Spirit? In Paul's letter to the Galatians, he says, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law." Trusting the Holy Spirit's leading will always get us to where we need to be.

Whatever new year's resolutions you might have in your personal life, let's all make some in terms of our faith life and church life.

Peace,





Our Church Family/News



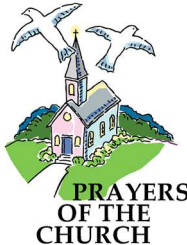
Ongoing Prayer List: If you would like to add or remove a name, please contact Carol Zaiatz (978-448-2091 or unioncc@uccgroton.org).

Peggy & John Blair
Mike Corbett & Family
Tiffany Gibb

Betty Goulet
Brigid and Brian Klingberg
Betty Sampas

Rudi Schmid
Matt & Mandy Spain
Joe Marchesani

Bill Moeller
Betty & Liz Waggoner
Laurie Waye



- For the Brown family, in the death of Connie Brown on Friday (12/18). Connie was a long-time member of UCC Groton and participated in the church for many years (Senior Choir, Flower Ministry, B&G Committee). We will all miss her.
- For Bonnie Marchesani and her family, in the death of her brother, Chris Joyce, (12/24). Please pray for Patty (his wife of 38 years) and the entire family at this difficult time.

Need prayer and need it now?

Simply email prayer@uccgroton.org and your request will go to the confidential pray-ers; or call Carol in the Church Office (978-448-2091) 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.

January Birthdays

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

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)! If everyone participates, this will add up to a significant amount. Please participate and watch our gifts grow!

Thank You!

Deb Shields would like to thank her church family for the beautiful Poinsettia plant.

A Message from the Stewardship Team

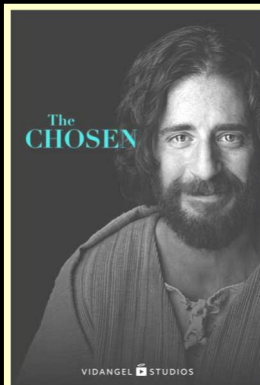
Thank you to everyone who pledged to UCC for 2021. (If you haven't pledged yet and would like to, it's not too late. Contact Margaret Wheeler to make your pledge.) For those who want dated, weekly offering envelopes, Margaret and Carol will be working to get them out to you during the first week of January. *If you have not pledged, but wish to receive offering envelopes, please contact Margaret Wheeler (collector@uccgroton.org) or the Church Office (unioncc@uccgroton.org;978-448-2091).*

Church News

Tinker (accessible) Trail in Groton, Harry Rich State Forest, October 2020 — somehow we got our procedure mixed up here.



Helen Misselhorn and Steve Legge, with Mia.



All Women of the Church are Invited!

L.I.L.I.E.S.
January 2021

After the holidays, we will announce details of our next study, which will start in late January. We plan to watch Season 1 of *The Chosen* (free on youtube) in the comfort of our own homes, and then discuss at our Zoom meetings. For a sneak peak, you can watch the trailer!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K1-FoFj8lbo>
(a link will be provided in the Friday email)

So get ready to hunker down this winter and “Binge Jesus”!!!!

Budget Meeting Summary (December 6)

The February 2 Annual Meeting minutes was accepted unanimously. Dennis Carey, Treasurer, presented the 2021 Budget. The 2020 original plan all changed due to the pandemic. We are going into 2021 making many of the same assumptions as 2020, knowing that it is going to change as the environment changes. Dennis highlighted a couple of significant changes from the 2020 Budget to the 2021 Budget. Regarding cash flow, Dennis replied that we are in very good shape; we started the year with over \$60k and currently have about \$55k in that account. Right now pledges are significantly short of where it needs to be to meet the budgeted amount. The proposed budget, including the Interim Pastor’s \$27k housing allowance, was approved by a unanimous vote.

Church Council Meeting Summary (December 16)

Based on the most recent state Covid guidelines for houses of worship (eight people for every thousand square feet), we should only have about 24 people in the Sanctuary at a time.

Discussion and discernment focused on pausing in-person worship and pivoting back to an online format beginning December 27. Since we already had about forty people signed up for Christmas Eve, we agreed to encourage people to self-select by joining the live Zoom feed instead of joining in person so we could stay within the guidelines.

Conversation focused on committee nominations for 2021 in terms of what openings there are, changes in meeting leadership, who is taking on consecutive terms, etc.

The Annual Meeting will be Sunday, January 31, via Zoom. Details will be forthcoming. Conversation touched upon having Worship, Coffee Hour, and the Annual Meeting all on Zoom so people can join as they are able.

Serving on Committees and Ministries

In preparation for our Annual Meeting on January 31, 2021 (when the “turnover” of committee members occurs), the Church Council invites you to let us know your interest in serving on Committees and Ministries. *Committee* positions require formal membership in the church and *Ministry* positions allow for anyone to serve.

Committees: Buildings & Grounds; Christian Education; Diaconate; Endowment; Missions; Pastor-Parish Relations; Stewardship & Finance

Ministries: Fair; Kitchen; Technology; Youth and Family

Feel free to contact our Moderator, Jean Armstrong, with your questions or to express an interest in a particular Committee or Ministry.

Annual Meeting

Sunday, January 31, After Worship

All are encouraged to attend via Zoom (a link will be provided closer to the date)! The two items seeking approval on the agenda are: 1) Nominations for Committees and Ministries; 2) The Final 2021 Operating Budget. **Details/content about these, as well as the 2020 Annual Report, will be available beginning January 19 at the Church Office** or electronically through a link in the Friday email. *Contact Jean Armstrong or Pastor Sanderson (corey@uccgroton.org) with your questions in advance of the meeting.*

Give & Take—Children’s Clothing Drive

Our UCC *Give & Take* of children's clothing is supporting *Loaves and Fishes'* clients, as well as our own family and friends. We continue to ask for donations that have been gently used to flourish our mission. You can drop off your clothing offerings at the Legge Family's house located at 856 Townsend Rd, Groton.

We welcome you to **make an appointment for either a Saturday or Sunday** to come by and see our clothing room on the first floor of the Parish House. In order to keep everyone safe during this difficult time, we aren't able to accept walk-in visits at this time.

Please contact Charlene Legge with any further questions.

Sunday School

The Christian Education Committee will continue with no in-person or virtual Sunday School Classes through the Winter curriculum. For PreK—6th grade, we have the pamphlets normally handed out during Sunday School. We have five families who have requested to receive the curriculum via mail.

If you have not yet responded and would like to receive these pamphlets at home, please contact Carol in the Church Office (unioncc@uccgroton.org; 978-448-2091) and she will add you to the mailing list. Please include your child/children’s name(s) and their grade, so she can be sure to send you the correct curriculum for that grade level. The pamphlets will be mailed on a monthly basis.

Christian Education Committee

—Carl Prestia, Chair

—Jenn Coviello

—Bonnie Marchesani

—Amy Nickerson

Missions—Christmas Angel Giving

In this year of COVID-19, the Missions Committee has decided to do *Christmas Angel Giving* a little differently this year. This year we are concentrating on helping the neediest people alleviate medical debt. Working with the non-profit *RIP Medical Debt*, every \$100 our Conference collects through this initiative is used to eliminate \$10,000 in medical debt in some of the neediest communities in our region, including Springfield, MA, Bridgeport and Hartford, CT, and Providence, RI.

For more information, use the links provided in the Friday email. If you are not on our email list, please contact the Church Office (978-448-2091; unioncc@uccgroton.org) and we will add you to the list.

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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 Update

Due to the current rise in COVID cases and the Governor's suggested recommendations, we have decided to pause in-person Worship beginning Sunday, December 27. Rev. Sanderson will send out recordings of Worship through our email list.

If you are not currently on our email list, please contact the Church Office (978-448-2091 or unioncc@uccgroton.org) to be added to our list. This will keep you informed on the changing situation.

When it is safe to do so, we will resume in-person Worship again. Please check your Friday emails for updates.

Thank you for your patience as we try to keep everyone safe.

God Bless!

