



God is still speaking,
**UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**



February 2015

Pastor's Page

Important Dates

Feb 5 & 19- Common Ground

Feb 18- Ash Wednesday

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As we slip-slide our way into February it is easy to lose touch due meeting cancelations and bad weather. Part of me would like to hibernate till Spring with a pile of books by the fire. But we are New Englanders, and winter does not keep us down! So here is a synopsis of what is ahead for First Churches in February.

LENT On February 18, Ash Wednesday is the beginning of the 40 day season of Lent. You can see a full **Lenten Calendar** of worship events, including Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Common Ground, on page 6 You will note that many of our special services are joint with other worshipping communities, including our own Common Ground, downtown congregations, and Cathedral in the Night. These are opportunities to affirm our solidarity and we worship together. Lent will also include our popular **House Church** reading and discussion groups. (See page 3) Look for a group and time convenient for you. We will also share ways you can participate in the annual **Carbon Fast** as a way of honoring the Lenten practice of giving something up as a spiritual discipline. (See page 4)

CHURCH COUNCIL We are half way through the church program year, and the great experiment of calling an Associate Pastor to minister to our Children and Youth, and to initiate Common Ground worship twice monthly. We voted to create a one year contract and to evaluate the process as we go, so Donna O'Meally, our Moderator,

invites everyone to our February 18th meeting. Pastor Sarah will share information on both programs and more about a major grant proposal being submitted in February. We would like to hear your feedback and work together to make any midyear adjustments before we get to the Annual Meeting in June. (You can learn more about Sunday School and Common Ground on page 3, and at our church website at www.firstchurches.org.)

(Continued)



As we look ahead, organ repairs have begun, a group is going to Haiti in March, we are planning more ways to support Syrian refugees, Dana is preparing for the Spring Cantata and we will be welcoming new members soon. Vanessa is working to make sure all updates get to the website and our Facebook page, as well as the Sunday Bulletin so you have the resources you need when you need it.

Pastor Todd

Lenten House Church Groups Start in February

On Ash Wednesday, February 18, we will kick off house church discussion groups on Rob Bell's book, "What We Talk About When We Talk About God." Amazon reviews describes the book below:

Pastor Rob Bell explains why both culture and the church resist talking about God, and shows how we can reconnect with the God who is pulling us forward into a better future. Bell uses his characteristic evocative storytelling to challenge everything you think you know about God. What We Talk About When We Talk About God tackles the misconceptions about God and reveals how God is with us, for us, ahead of us, and how understanding this could change the entire course of our lives.



If you would like to be on the list of possibilities for either group, contact Pastor Todd. We will have sign-up sheets in February once we have selected



Taq Rumial

School in Guatemala started this month (their long vacation is October, November and December) and so the children are now getting some of the school supplies we sent to use in school. They are also getting packets of other supplies they bought with the money we donated, such as the spiral notebooks. Click [here](#) to watch a thank you video from Irlanda.

I sent Taq Rumial Junajpu a tablet via some friends who were travelling to Guatemala (it was bought using my funds, not First Churches donations) and now Irlanda has sent me a photos of all the families who will be participating this year. A longer article will be posted on the website, stay tuned. Oonagh is seeking sponsors for long term aid to families in Guatemala.

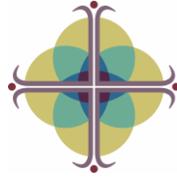
Oonagh Doherty

COMMON GROUND AND CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

The rumors are true! In honor of Black History Month, the Amherst Area Gospel Choir will be joining us for Common Ground on February 5th. We will meet in Lyman Hall.

Schedule for the Evening

5:15 - Set-up (Note: we won't be cooking together, since the soup takes more than an hour; but as you know, there's always lots to do, so come early to help set-up if you can.)



COMMON GROUND

6:00 Worship begins with candles and communion

6:45 -7:15 The AAG Choir will sing (our participation will be welcome and encouraged)

7:30 - Blessing and clean up

8:00 - Common Ground After Dark at The Foundry (Night owls are welcome to come relax and continue the conversation over foreign teas and local beers).

We hope you will join us for an evening of inspiration and song.

First Churches Christian Ed

ST. John's Lock In

Ok, I'll admit that at 7:00 on the Friday night of our lock-in, I was less than enthusiastic about the prospect of going out in the cold to stay up all night at St. John's, but once I got there, I had a blast. We played basketball and improv games, made spirit bundles, watched movies, ate lots of great food, and stayed up way too late. But it was fun, fun, fun! Many thanks to Manny for coming along to help chaperone.

Upcoming Events

For Teens- March 27-28th

Sabbath Retreat Craigville Retreat Center on Cape Cod

I'll be co-leading this retreat with another UCC minister and it should be a lot of fun. Come to worship, to sing, to discern God's call in your life, to build community with other youth from around the conference, take long walks on the beach and reflect on the meaning of Sabbath in our modern technological world.

For Kids- Valentine's Day We'll be making valentines as part of Sunday School on Sunday the 8th.

Movie Night The CE is thinking of hosting a movie night. We could either host a night for families to enjoy a movie together in Lyman Hall or set it up so parents can drop off their children and then go off to enjoy something called a "date night." I'd love to get some feedback from you all about what you would prefer and who might be willing to help.

Pastor Sarah

THE ORGAN FUND

At the January Council meeting, the Church Council voted to establish an Organ Fund and ad hoc committee to solicit money for the organ repairs currently taking place. This committee will exist for not more than one year and all proceeds will be used to pay down the line of credit at NUVO Bank which is being used to pay the repair

bills as they come in. Marcia Kennick, Dana Pasquale, Dick Purrington and Peg Whitham have volunteered to serve on the hoc committee.

As Dana has already explained, these repairs to the damaged wind reservoirs are necessary if the

Church is to maintain the stewardship of the Skinner Organ. The cost of this project is \$26,220 with the possibility of an additional \$6000 for tuning and



other minor repairs following the major repair. It was felt that any fundraising that might raise monies to help defray the cost of the organ repairs would serve to help the church through this financially challenging time.

So that is the Organ Fund Committee's intention. The Organ Fund has started up and incoming funds total (to date) \$2765. We are excited to be initiating this fundraiser and know that many members and friends will be willing to support this fund drive.

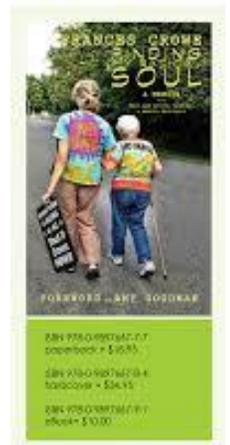
Marcia, Dana, Dick, Peg
Organ Fund Committee



Congratulations Francis Crowe!

The Peace and Justice Committee has obtained a copy of Frances Crowe's book, "Finding My Radical Soul". The book is available in the Church office for anyone interested in borrowing it. The book is also available at Broadside Books on Main St, or online by clicking the picture on the left. It is available as an ebook as well.

Please drop by or call the church office to borrow.



PREPARING FOR THE LENTEN CARBON FAST 2015

Center for Eco Technology presents "Ways to Save at Home"
Second Hour on Feb. 15th

You are invited to join Amanda Jacir of the Center for Eco Technology after worship in the Parlor to learn more about ways to reduce carbon (and spending!) at home. She will present two Green Energy programs you can participate in as a renter or homeowner. Mass Save offers free home energy assessment for home owners and renters. Mass Energy is programs to purchase clean energy for your electric bill. Come learn more about how you can either save money or increase your use of green energy.

HAITI

Several First Churches members have been making annual visits to Haiti, along with the First Congregational Church of Longmeadow, to work with CONASPEH, an alliance of around 7,000 Protestant churches. CONASPEH operates a pre-school through 13th grade school, nursing program, and seminary, and is supported by the UCC-sponsored Global Ministries. In 2009 Pauline Bassett and David Entin met Miguelson Charles, an impressive CONASPEH high school graduate who translated for them. They stayed in contact with Miguelson, through the devastating earthquake and as he enrolled in the law program at a local University in Port-au-Prince. Pauline and David helped him apply successfully for admission to Trinity College in Hartford, which offered him a \$50,000 a year scholarship, but the US State Department would not grant him a student visa to come to the US for his education. He is now half way through his five-year law program.



Miguelson received a tourist visa last month and for the first time visited the US and came to First Churches, where he spoke to us during a Second Hour program on January 18. Miguelson thanked First Churches for their financial and spiritual support. He told us about his family and life in Haiti and concerns that the current President has not allowed elections for the Parliament, which is now disbanded. President Martelly is now planning to rule by decree, the mark of an undemocratic dictator. We have further learned of plans for his administration to grant American corporations the rights to mineral wealth, such as gold, in Haiti, at the expense of the people, the poorest in the Western Hemisphere. Miguelson hopes to begin working for a movement for progressive change in Haiti, to wrest control from the elite 5% who own and control most everything in Haiti. He asked that we keep Haiti in our prayers.

David Entin & Pauline Bassett

Cot Shelter Meals

Thank you to everyone who has assisted in the last few Interfaith Cot Shelter Meals. It is greatly appreciated by the shelter. The next meal is Monday, February 2nd. The meal is set as is volunteers. If anyone is interested in assisting with the March Cot Shelter Meal, please contact Jenna Sellers at jennasellers@gmail.com

THANK YOU for supporting this important ministry. The Cot Shelter is very much in my mind these days as I sit in my warm house and watch the snow fall outside my window.

Jenna Sellers

LENTEN CALENDAR

Blessing of the Palms Sunday, March 29

Meet at Pulaski Park at 9:30 AM with Edwards UCC Church and St. John's to bless the palms together and process to worship.

Maundy Thursday – April 2

Dinner hosted by Common Ground

Prep at 5:00 Meal at 6:00

Tenebrae Candlelight Communion
7:00 PM

Ash Wednesday- February 18

Ashes to Go – noon to 1 PM on the church steps.

Ash Wednesday Service

4:30pm Outdoor Service
With Cathedral in the Night
6-6:30pm Ash Wednesday Meditation in Lyman Hall
Church Council to follow at 7:00 PM

Common Ground Ash Thursday

February 19 with meal at 6:00 PM



Good Friday Ecumenical Walk

April 3 at noon

Join other Northampton congregations to experience the Seven Last Words of Jesus as we move around the city.



Would you like to know more about [Lent](#)? Click the link to find out more. If you are unable, please come see Vanessa in the office and she will play it for you!

PRAYER SHAWL KNITTING CIRCLE

New opportunity for Ministry in Action

I invite interested social knitters to join me in a Prayer Shawl Knitting Circle. Prayer Shawls (also called Comfort Shawls) are homemade throws, each made in a spirit of love and blessing for the intended recipient. This meaningful activity, when shared, also offers a wonderful opportunity to get to know people on a different level, thereby contributing to building our beloved community.

What particularly appeals to me about this ministry is how the creation of a prayer shawl is a spiritual practice for the maker. As I've experienced knitting, the rhythmic activity brings on a contemplative, even healing, mindset. The process of making a shawl -- using one's hands and focused intentions, your own prayers and loving thoughts -- becomes gift not only for the one receiving the shawl, but for the knitter as well. Knitting in a group adds the benefits of socialization and shared good will.

"Shawls ... made for centuries universal and embracing, symbolic of an inclusive, unconditionally loving, God. They wrap, enfold, comfort, cover, give solace, mother, hug, shelter and beautify. Those who have received these shawls have been uplifted and affirmed, as if given wings to fly above their troubles..."

Written in 1998 by: Janet Severi Bristow
(Cofounder of Shawl Ministry)

For more information, check out
www.shawlministry.com



In making prayer shawls, compassion and the love of knitting/crocheting have been combined into a prayerful ministry and spiritual practice which reaches out to those in need of comfort and solace, as well as in celebration and joy. Many blessings are prayed into every stitch.

Our shawls can be intended for members of First Churches. They may also be given to members of the wider community.

You do not need to be an expert knitter to join; the basic pattern relies on a simple combination of knit and purl. I anticipate more experienced knitters will gladly help novices gain ease and confidence. All you need is a desire for group companionship in a meaningful activity.

To make this ministry accessible, I propose two time slots.

First meeting, (includes discussing the meaning, making, and uses of Prayer/Comfort Shawls at):

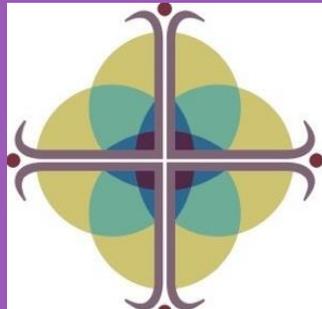
Evening Prayer Shawl Circle gathering -- Tuesday February 17th at 6:30 pm at Jeanne's home

Daytime Prayer Shawl Circle gathering -- Wednesday February 18th at 1:30 pm, in the church Parlor

Interested? Want to know what supplies you need to bring? Please express your interest and intention by calling 413-584-9392.

I look forward to sharing the manifold rewards of knitting with you!

Jeanne Fenton



February 2015

Sun.	Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thu.	Fri.	Sat.
1. 10:00 Worship & Sunday School 11:40 Bell Choir 5:00 Cathedral in the Night	2. 12:00 Bible Study ☪ Carol Judd ☪ Sharon Moulton	3.	4. 12:30 Finance 7:00 Deacons	5. 5:30 Common Ground	6. 7:00 Choir Practice	7.
8. 10:00 Worship & Sunday School 11:40 Bell Choir 5:00 Cathedral in the Night	9. 12:00 Bible Study 7:00 Peace & Justice	10.	11. 6:30 Trustees 6:30 Missions ☪ Maya O'Meally NOFA Soil & Nutrition Conference	12. NOFA Soil & Nutrition Conference	13. 7:00 Choir Practice	14. Happy Valentine's Day
15. 10:00 Worship & Sunday School 11:40 Bell Choir 5:00 Cathedral in the Night	16. 12:00 Bible Study	17.	18. 5:00 Christian Ed 7:00 Council ASH WEDNESDAY See page 6 for full calendar	19. 12:30 Dorcas Luncheon @ Brew Master's Tavern 5:30 Common Ground	20. 7:00 Choir Practice March Messenger Items Due	21.
22. 10:00 Worship & Sunday School 11:40 Bell Choir 5:00 Cathedral in the Night ☪ Sarah Reed ☪ Alexander Ala	23. 12:00 Bible Study	24. ☪ Lisa Thwing	25. 7:00 Welcome & Outreach	26.	27. 7:00 Choir Practice	28.