



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



MARCH 2015

PASTOR'S PAGE

Important Dates

March 5th & 19th Common Ground

March 7th- Celebration of Speech

March 8th- Pastor Liza's Ordination

March 14th- Vivian Eastman's Memorial

March 26th- Maundy Thursday

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It feels like we have been in Lent for 40 days already, even though Ash Wednesday was just last week. By my count, we have faced snow, ice or extreme cold for 7 Sundays in a row! I am amazed how many people have come out on some terrible Sundays, and we have had good worship with whomever shows up. Many of our best-laid plans have had few participants, and I miss everyone and the feeling we have when we are all together. I especially miss those who are ill, homebound in the weather, and our two members who have died in February, Vivian Eastman and Edna Michalowski. It has been a tough winter-and now we have Lent! Haven't we done penance enough?

I admit that I really like Lent. No, it is not because I like suffering and self-denial. Lent gives me permission to stop and be honest. I ask different questions. Instead of questions about my success, competency, and comforts, I turn to questions like: Is my prayer life adequate? Am I living a life listening to God's Spirit or am I over-planning and over-functioning? Where have I been too busy to notice the suffering and struggles of people around me? These may sound like difficult and uncomfortable questions. They are! But life does become more meaningful and clear when I am honest. Lent helps me restore my integrity.

The liturgy and practices of Lent give us a structure for challenges of self-reflection and change. Sunday worship (and Common Ground!) deepen our life of prayer and offer replenishment. Our House Church book groups build community as we discuss important topics together. What do we mean when we talk about God? And we engage in mission as we practice the Lenten Carbon Fast and serve meals at the cot shelter. (You can see the page numbers for articles on all these things on the sidebar.)

I invite you to experience Lent with us. We do not have to face ourselves alone. Come join us so we can be restored together!

Pastor Todd

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

Although the weather has really put a dent in our attendance, we've still managed to keep the doors of the church open and the Sunday School running. I'd like to thank all of our teachers and helpers for digging out Sunday after Sunday and making their way to church. And I'd especially like to thank all of you parents who have been so faithful about bringing your children to church when you can. I know it isn't always easy to make it to church, even on a good Sunday. But when the weather is as bad as it has been, it can be especially challenging. Ultimately our program works because of you and the presence of your beautiful children. God bless you for your efforts. We have some fun activities coming up for children and teens.

There is still room for teens who would like to join us for our **SABBATH RETREAT** at Craigville on **March 27-28**. We'll be leaving from St. John's church at 3 pm on Friday and returning Saturday evening. I'll be co-leading this retreat and I can promise that it will be fun, relaxing, and inspiring. We hope the youth will return home with a better understanding of Sabbath and how they can incorporate it into their lives.

TEEN MOVIE NIGHT

(6th grade and up)

First Churches Parlor

APRIL 10TH

6-8:30

We'll gather for pizza, popcorn, and a movie. Suggestions for the movie are most welcome.

KIDS MOVIE NIGHT

(Ages 3-11)

MAY 1st

5:45-7:45

Parents, you can actually drop off your kids at the church from 5:45-7:45 and go out on a date. We'll serve pizza to the kids and watch a movie together. They are also welcome to come in pajamas if that makes things easier for you.

ORGAN FUND COMMITTEE UPDATE

The Organ Committee has been met twice and is currently carefully planning the implementation of the level of fundraising that is to be undertaken. At the present time plans are in the works for a letter that will be sent out to the congregation and friends of the church giving those who choose to an opportunity to make a donation to the organ fund. The committee is also beginning to work on creating a brochure about the historic Skinner organ.

The organ fund, with additional donations, currently totals \$3790. This may not seem like much, but taken into perspective, it is a bit more than 1/7 of \$26,220 (the cost of the major restorations).

But we have saved the best for last...the organ has been reinstalled and three (3) auspicious events are scheduled to occur on Sunday, March 8. The first and second are that the organ will be heard at the end of the Sunday service and then again at Liza Knapp's ordination service that Sunday afternoon. The third will occur as a Second Hour event after the Sunday service; Dana will present a PowerPoint slide show detailing the procedure of the repairs that were made to the organ while in the shop before its reinstallation.

Marcia, Dick, Dana, Peg
Organ Fund Committee



Dinner Church
1st and 3rd Thursdays
6 pm in Lyman Hall

Thanks to the love and unwavering support of the First Churches community, Common Ground continues to thrive. We have 2 wonderful services coming up in March and we will be hosting you all for a joint Maundy Thursday service on April 2. And several folks involved with Common Ground have joined or are leading Lenten book groups as we read “What we Talk About When We Talk About God.” May God bless our communities as they continue to grow together.

March 5

As we continue our exploration of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount we’ll explore the idea that holiness comes from within. Over bowls of Mark Bittman’s “best Ever Vegetable Soup” we’ll be connecting the work we are called to do on our souls to the work we are called to do in the world.

March 19th

Come celebrate our first year anniversary! If you’ve never been to Common Ground, have been meaning to come or just haven’t been in awhile, come and see what we’ve become. We will re-create the cream of tomato soup we enjoyed at our first gathering, and something tells me there will be cake! We will be exploring Jesus’ admonition to not worry or judge and looking to him for a different way to be in the world.

AND LOOKING AHEAD, DON’T MISS

Maundy Thursday

April 2nd, 6:00 pm
Lyman Hall

Common Ground will be hosting a **Tenebrae Candlelight Dinner and Communion Service** featuring the choir of First Churches. We’ll be serving lentils and rice and looking for people to provide:

- ☛ **Chicken soup**
- ☛ **Pitas or Naan**
- ☛ **Tomato mozzarella basil salad**

- ☛ **Tabouli**
- ☛ **Hummus**
- ☛ **Veggie and fruit platters**

We hope you will join us for what promises to be a deeply moving service of worship.

Pastor Sarah

LIZA KNAPP’S ORDINATION

On March 8th at 3pm, First Churches will host Pastor Liza Knapp’s Ordination. We invite members of Belchertown Congregational and First Churches to join us in celebrating Liza’s accomplishments. We will hear from both choirs, and a reception will follow in Lyman Hall. We are looking for First Churches members to be greeters. If you are interested in being a greeter, or assisting with the reception, please call Vanessa at the Church office. See you there!



EXPERIENCE LENT AT FIRST CHURCHES

Join us as we re-examine some of the traditional themes of Lent with open minds and inclusive hearts.

Lenten Sermon Series
Sunday Mornings
10 am

Rethinking
what we talk about
when we talk about...

Temptation
Feb. 22

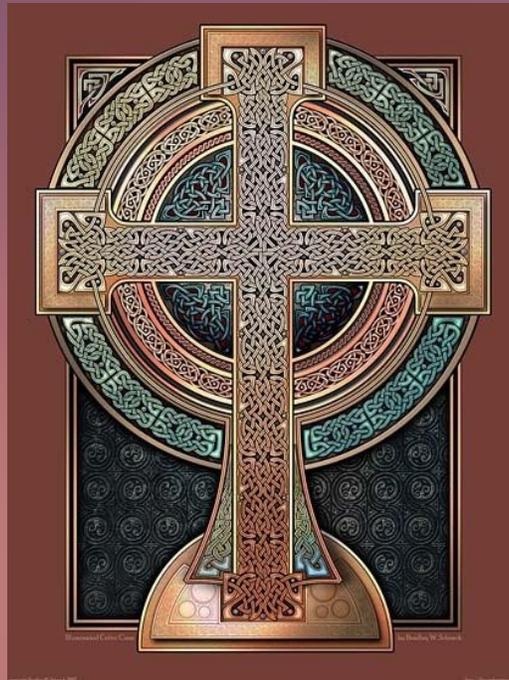
Suffering
March 1

The Cross
March 8

Salvation
March 15

Sacrifice
March 22

The Passion
March 29



Blessing of the Palms

Sunday, March 29
Pulaski Park 9:30 am
Blessing of the palms and
processional with
Edwards UCC and St.
John's.

Maundy Thursday

April 2, 6:00 pm
Tenebrae Candlelight
Dinner and Communion

Good Friday

Ecumenical Walk

April 3 at noon
Come experience the
seven last words of Jesus
as we move around the
city.

Common Ground
Dinner Church
1st and 3rd Thursdays
6 pm

February 19

Exploring and reflecting
upon the Lenten symbols
of salt, light, sackcloth,
and ash.

March 5

Holiness comes from
within. Over dinner we'll
be connecting the work we
are called to do on our
souls to the work we are
called to do in the world.

March 19

Worry. Anxiety. Judgment.
t. We'll be digging deep
into the roots of these all-
too-human states and
looking to Jesus for a
different way to be in the
world.

How gratifying it is to realize what a generous congregation you are as you responded to a variety of projects over the past few months. 35 children in foster care at the Treehouse Community in Easthampton happily received Christmas gifts from you. Kerry Homstead of the Treehouse Foundation wrote to thank you, saying "Your giving added such meaning and joy to the holidays." (Which can be read [here](#)) We set a goal of \$300 for the retired clergy offerings of both churches and accepted donations throughout Advent totaling \$519 - money gifts gratefully received by our retired leaders. The month of January found overflowing boxes full of much needed supplies for Syrian refugees who live in the cold snowy mountainous region of Jordan near its border with Syria. Your thoughtful contributions have been delivered to Michael Kane, who described the sad plight of these people to us on January 4th. He will get them to Boston for a monthly shipment to Jordan. Thank you all so much.

Oonagh Doherty is our contact with the mothers' group in Guatemala that gratefully received our school supplies for their children in November when she visited them. In January, she sent \$410 that was given to her following her talk about this mission at an after-church program in the Fall, and also from a percentage of the sale of crafts at the November fair. More school supplies will be purchased with this new gift.



Coming up will be the One Great Hour of Sharing offering in March, the Crop Walk on April 26, then in May, donations to the Haiti Scholarship Fund for students at the CONASPEH school in Haiti.

The One Great Hour of Sharing offering will be taken March 15 & 22, following a Mission Moment on March 8 by Denise Karuth. This offering helps people after natural disasters such as the earthquake in Haiti and Hurricane Sandy in New York and New Jersey, and also is given to families living in countries going through civil unrest. Often it is distributed through Church World Service.

Two important funds deserve our support and have lapsed recently. Taken the first Sunday of each month, we will alternate months and have envelopes available March 8 for the Interfaith Help Fund that supports members of our local community who are having difficulty paying for oil or gas, electricity, rent, or some such necessity. Sue Stone handles this for us at the Senior Center once a month. As the first Sunday of the month in April is Easter, we will take an offering on April 12 to support persons in our own congregation in difficulty, through the Pastor's Church Family Fund, which is administered by Pastor Todd through a checking account that is private and separate from church funds. As always, your support of our local and church communities, is welcome and appreciated.



COFFEE WITH THE PASTORS

Exploring Church Membership -- March 15

If you are new to First Churches and interested in learning more about our mission, opportunities for involvement and the meaning of membership, join Pastors Todd and Sarah after worship on March 15. (We will meet in Pastor Todd's study just off Lyman Hall). Feel free to bring a cup of coffee or tea with you and come meet other newcomers and explore how joining First Churches may be right for you.

CROP WALK 2015

On **Sunday April 26 at 12:00**, people from several area churches and organizations will gather at First Churches for a walk to fight hunger around the world.

Walkers will seek pledges. Of the money gathered, 75% goes to Church World Service for their efforts to address the need for stable sources of food and water around the world, disaster relief and recovery and may other efforts to improve the lot of the world's poor. 25% of the money gathered stays locally with a hunger-related agency chosen by the Walk organizers. The CROP Walk is a lot of fun for adults and children of all ages, and raises money for some of the most crippling issues we face today. Please join us! Click [here](#) to find out more!

If you have questions, please feel free to send an e-mail to Dori McCracken or Sandie Pirrello @ dmccracken@registrar.umass.edu or pirrello@cas.umass.edu



HOUSE CHURCH SCHEDULE

Monday Nights @ 7 PM

Host and Facilitators:
Jenna Sellers & Patti Richmond
Easthampton, 11 Pinebrook Drive

Tuesday Nights @ 6:30 PM

Host and Facilitators:
Sarah Buteux and Andrew Dole
Amherst, 998 East Pleasant Street

Michael's House Meeting Room @ 7PM

Host: Elaine Wert
Facilitator: Greg Richane
Northampton, 71 State Street,
next to Serio's Grocery store

Wednesday Nights @ 7 PM

Host: Barbara Parsons
Facilitator: Becky Lockwood
Florence, 7 Summerfield Street

Sundays after church

Meet in the Parlor at 11:30

Week 1 - Starting February 23
Chapter 2 – *Hum* pgs 1-20

Week 2 – Starting March 2
Chapter 2 – *Open* pgs 21-80

Week 3 – Starting March 9
Chapters 3 & 4 – *Both* and *With*
pgs 81-126

Week 4 – Starting March 16
Chapter 5 – *For* pgs 127-152

Week 5 - Starting March 23
Chapters 6 & 7– *Ahead* and *So*
pgs 153-208

You can find updates on the church website at <http://firstchurches.org/housechurchreading/> at the top of the page. Just look under the Spiritual Growth menu and the "Small Groups" tab. Feel free to share thoughts and comments as we go along. (And don't worry about internet "trolls." We moderate the forums.) Enjoy the book and reading and sharing together!



Notice the bulletin board in Lyman Hall. That big brown tree needs a few green leaves! Take a pamphlet from below the board to get some ideas how you might make your part of the world a little greener --- more

energy efficient, less carbon in the air, less climate change. Then pick a leaf (or make your own) and write a sentence about one thing you've done, or plan to do. Pin your leaf on the tree.

Here are a few green ideas: Call Mass Save (a state agency) for a free energy audit of your home (866-527-SAVE). Change your lightbulbs from Incandescent to LED. Install a power strip so you can turn off electronics when you're not home. Get a programmable thermostat. Insulate your attic. Walk or ride a bike to the corner instead of driving. Carpool. Dry your washing on a line. Compost. Recycle when possible.



CET (Center for Ecotechnology), located in the BayState Cutlery building, sent Amanda Jacir and Caitlin Burgess to present a 2nd Hour program Feb.15 on local green sources for household electricity. National Grid distributes our electricity, but they buy it from the cheapest sources --- at this time, that means electricity made from burning fossil fuels. Electricity for an average MA household is responsible for three and one-half tons of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere each year.

Two green programs are available in Western Massachusetts: New England Green Start (hydro, solar, wind, & cow power) and New England Wind. You pay a little extra on your electric bill for either one --- 2.4 cents per

kilowatt hour (in addition to your regular bill) for Green Start, and 3.8 cents for Wind. If interested, see pamphlets on the bulletin board, or call CET (586--7350) Amanda will be back for another 2nd Hour after Lent.



MAKE THIS YOUR LENTEN DISCIPLINE!

Excerpted from MACUCC.org

2015 is the fifth year that we will provide a day-by-day opportunity to fast from carbon as a Lenten discipline. Initiated by the UCC and endorsed by other denominations and faith groups, people of every Christian perspective – and people who are not Christians – have benefited from this opportunity to become more conscious and conscientious in their daily lives.

We don't expect everyone to be able to do everything suggested; but serious consideration of each day's activity can raise people's awareness, inviting them to think more carefully about how their day to day living impacts the environment and make the changes they can. The intention is to provide do-able actions which can make a difference; not to overwhelm people, or make them feel bad about themselves, or cause them to feel that the situation is hopeless. We want people to empower people so they can challenge themselves to do more.

Sign up for a daily carbon email or find out [MORE!](#) By clicking the link.

COUNCIL REPORT FROM FEBRUARY

Our first priority at Church Council was to check in about our new Associate Pastor position at the 7-month mark and invite feedback from the congregation. A few people braved the cold weather and shared positive messages about the growth of the children's program, the creative and well-attended Common Ground worship services, and the strength and cooperation of our clergy team. There has been a good flow of attendance between Sunday service and Common Ground, and several folks from Common Ground are attending our House Church book groups. Every book group leaders has attended at least one Common Ground service and we look forward to a joint worship service on Maundy Thursday.

We thought it would be helpful to add some statistics to where we stand at the moment. Here are some comparisons between September to December of 2013 and 2014. (The snow fall has distorted comparisons since January!)

- Avg. Worship Attendance 2013 – 75
2014 - 91
- Avg. Sunday School 2013 - 8
2014 - 17
- Avg. Common Ground worship since September - 33

(The trend is upward, with three services over 40 in 2015)

- New members in the Fall - 8
(We hope for at least 8 more in the Spring!)

Financial picture:

- Money raised for Common Ground so far - \$12,000
- Projected money raised by June 30, 2015 - \$15,000
- Budget Goal for this Fiscal year - \$30,000

Comment: Raising \$15,000 in the first year is substantial, and we had hoped to raise \$20,000 through pledges and \$10,000 through grants. We have not received grant revenue yet, and the most likely grant source will announce awards in April, but this won't help us until next fiscal year. Fortunately the church budget will be greatly helped by refinancing the mortgage on the building, which should keep us on track with our overall budget projections.

We would like to thank everyone who has helped make this new ministry successful. Many of you have taught Sunday School, increased pledges, cooked meals and supported the ministries of First Churches. Thank you!

Pastor Todd and Pastor Sarah

NEW PHOTO DIRECTORY

On March 24th and 25th from 1-8pm First Churches will be taking photos for our new photo directory. Seriously, we need you for the directory! Please call the office to schedule your photo session. We are seeking volunteers to greet members coming in for their photos. I can't wait to see you all, since I rarely ever see you all on the same day. See you then!

KITCHEN PARTY!!!

Sunday, March 8 (the 2nd Sunday in March) after worship and 2nd hour, anyone who is interested is invited to join Heidi Rademacher, Pastor Sarah, and me (Jenna Sellers) for a kitchen reorganization and cleaning party.

The 3rd Annual
Celebration of Speech

In honor of International Women's Day



"What is Feminism?"

March 7, 2015
12:00 pm - 8:00 pm

First Churches of Northampton
129 Main Street

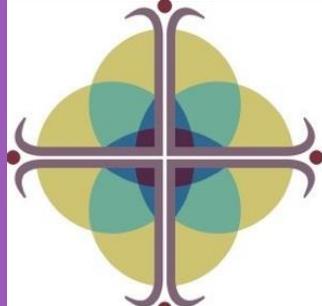
FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Doors open at 11:45 am

Reception at 8:00 pm

In honor of International Women's Day, Women's Voices Worldwide, Inc. invites you to visit downtown Northampton, MA to witness a celebration of women's speech from past to present. Through historic re-enactments, contemporary speeches, musical performances, and a celebratory reception, people of all ages and backgrounds will join together to recognize and honor the importance of women's voices in the world.

[Click here for program schedule](#)



March 2015

Sun.	Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thu.	Fri.	Sat.
1. 10:00 Worship & Sunday School 5:00 Cathedral in the Night- First Churches serving	2. 12:00 Bible Study 7:00 Peace & Justice ☪ Sandie Pirrello	3. 12:00 Peace Vigil	4. 7:00 Deacons	5. 5:30 Common Ground	6. 7:00 Choir Practice	7. Celebration of Speech
8. 10:00 Worship & Sunday School 3:00 Liza's Ordination 5:00 CITN	9. 12:00 Bible Study ☪ Sam Felton-Emrick	10. 12:00 Peace Vigil	11. 12:30 Finance 6:30 Trustees 6:30 Missions ☪ Dan Kushin	12.	13. 7:00 Choir Practice ☪ Anna Murphy	14. 10:30 Vivian Eastman's Memorial
15. 10:00 Worship & Sunday School 11:40 Bell Choir 5:00 CITN	16. 12:00 Bible Study	17. 12:00 Peace Vigil 1:00 Prayer Shawl Ministry, Parlor	18. 5:00 Christian Ed 7:00 Council	19. 12:30 Dorcas Luncheon 5:30 Common Ground	20. 7:00 Choir Practice	21.
22. 10:00 Worship & Sunday School 11:40 Bell Choir 5:00 CITN ☪ Hunter Montalvo-Green	23. 12:00 Bible Study April Messenger Items Due	24. 12:00 Peace Vigil 1-8:00 Photo Directory photographs 6:30 Prayer Shawl Ministry, Home of Doryne Pederzani-Dineen	25. 1-8:00 Photo Directory photographs 7:00 Welcome & Outreach	26. Maundy Thursday	27. 7:00 Choir Practice	28. ☪ Asa Geller
29. 10:00 Worship & Sunday School 11:40 Bell Choir 5:00 CITN ☪ Dori McCracken	30.	31. ☪ Pastor Todd				