



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



**MAY 2015**

**PASTOR'S PAGE**

**Important Dates**

- May 2 - Hamp Pride Parade
- May 3 - Presentation of Asking Budget
- May 6 - Don Remick
- May 7 & 21 - Common Ground
- May 24 - Pentecost Sunday

**Looking For.....**

- Sunday School & Common Ground..... pg 2
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- Upcoming event..... pg 6 & 7
- Calendar..... pg 8
- MACUCC Annual Meeting ..... pg 9

Planting season is here! I'm moving seed packets around on the table to map out my garden. If I plant half in tomatoes, a row of radishes, a basil patch and peas around the edges, can I still fit in a couple of bush watermelons? A good plan and getting the right seeds in the ground at the right times matters. We are sowing seeds of faith here at First Churches this year and they are growing before our eyes. I'm writing to share with you the good news we are sowing and how you can help us to continue bearing good fruit.

At the 2014 Annual Meeting we called Rev. Sarah Buteux as Associate Pastor to plant with us. This has allowed us to have two strong worship services to meet the spiritual needs of more people. Sarah launched *Common Ground*, a "farm-to-table" dinner worship experience, every first and third Thursday evening. It has sprouted quickly to 35 to 40 people every week, and a moving Tenebrae service hosted over 70 people. Sarah has also guided our Sunday School classes to double, and has introduced an innovative "Whirl" curriculum that fosters a love of learning for our children. (And some of our adult teachers report learning a lot too!)

The ability to deploy two pastors sowing seeds creates more opportunities. I have more time for creative worship, pastoral visits, community networking, leading Bible Study and spiritual growth groups, and projects like refinancing our mortgage to save up to \$14,000 annually.

You have been planting seeds (and watering and pulling weeds too!) During Lent we had five house church book study groups with over 40 people participating. You have fed hungry and homeless people at the Cot Shelter and Cathedral in the Night; supported mission projects in Haiti, Guatemala and Syria; and hosted numerous forums on issues of justice and peace. The Skinner Organ has been refurbished and fundraising is going strong. We have had a wonderful year of music capped by the Vivaldi Cantata last week.

We are a blossoming and fruitful garden. The national United Church of Christ is affirming our work too, recently awarding First Churches with a **Church Renewal Matching Grant!** We will receive up to \$30,000 over the next 18 months and up to \$60,000 over the next five years. It feels like we just added an irrigation system to help us grow!  
(Continued pg 3)



*"Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty." Matthew 13:8 (NRSV)*



## 34<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL PRIDE PARADE!!!!



34th Annual LGBT Parade and Pride event  
**May 2, 2015 12pm-5pm Rain or Shine**  
THREE County Fairgrounds ~ Northampton, MA

First Churches will be marching with our amazing banner again this year. This is an extremely family friendly event, come join us to support our LGBTQ community. The parade begins in the parking lot on Hampton Ave, across from the Northampton Brewery, Gathering time is **11:00am**, but you may want to come a little early to find our group and have a picture taken. Click on the NOHO PRIDE rainbows above for more information.

***“No matter who you are, no matter where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here.”***



### ASSOCIATE PASTOR’S PAGE



I’d like to begin by thanking everyone for your love, prayers, and patience while I was ill. It was pretty rough going there for a while and I could feel you with me through it all. One thing that came across very clearly is that you don’t just value me for what I do, but for who I am. Too often in life we can feel like human doings rather than human beings. Your care for me as a person, rather than just a pastor, means a great deal to me. Thank you.

And now on to the news: **Common Ground** will meet May 7 and 21<sup>st</sup> this month. I’ll be leading the first gathering and we’ll have a special guest – Clem Clay of Grow Food Northampton, for our second May dinner. Clem will be speaking about sustainable food growing practices.

We also have a garden plot in the Grow Food Northampton Community Garden in Florence. If you like to garden or just hang out in them, we’d love your help as we plant and raise food we hope to use for Common Ground dinners in the future.

And in case you didn’t hear, **Common Ground and First Churches are the recipient of the national church renewal matching grant of \$30,000!** This is a huge show of support from our national church and will go a long way toward helping us strengthen C.G. and the overall ministry of First Churches. Praise be to God!

But wait, there’s more. **We also have a summer intern!** Ana Nazir, who some of you have met at church, is a Hampshire College student who will be with us all summer. Ana will continue our Sunday school program through the summer with a one room school house model, and will plan to focus on our kids anytime we have an official work gathering at the garden. We can use one more person in the rainbow room through the summer and on into the fall, so if you know of anyone looking for a little extra work, please send them my way.

We have a **children’s movie night** planned for this Friday, May 1. We had 13 kids come to the teen movie night and everyone had a wonderful time. I’m really excited for this one.

Looking ahead, a few more important dates to get on your calendar: **Confirmation** is planned for June 7, St. John’s will be hosting our teens for a **Bonfire** night complete with camp songs and s’mores on June 13th, and **Children’s Sunday** is planned for June 21<sup>st</sup>.

God bless you all,  
Pastor Sarah

## ORGAN FUND COMMITTEE UPDATE

We are pleased to report the “asking” letter that was sent out to the congregation in early April was very well received. The Organ Fund has received a steady amount of donations and the **current total** is at **\$13,325**. That is one-half of the current expense of \$26,220 for the organ repairs. How exciting it would be if the Organ Fund was able to defray two thirds (\$17,567) or even three fourths (\$19,665) of the cost!

The committee has begun the second task of our mission... and that is the creation of a brochure about the Skinner organ which can serve as a source of information for many years to come (we hope). Our goal is to have it available in time for the concert in early July. Gregory Wilson has offered to share his *organizational* expertise in helping us with this endeavor.

For those who have given...thank you...

For those who plan to give...thank you for your intentions...

Still quietly at work...

Marcia, Dana, Dick, Peg

## GROCERY CARD SCHEDULE FOR MAY 2015



Sales of grocery cards will continue through the month of May...here is the schedule of dates when they will be offered at coffee hour:

- Sunday May 10
- Sunday May 17
- Sunday May 31.

If for some reason you might want to purchase grocery cards at other times during the month of May...Peg Whitham can be reached at 586-2531 and arrangements can be made for purchase of the cards.

As of the end of April, the profit from the sale of \$32,725 worth of grocery cards totals \$1715.50.

Thank you all for your support of this “painless” fundraiser!!!

### **Pastor’s Page Continued...**

Our garden is growing and needs all of you to sustain it. Like a community garden, we need everyone pitching in, and every effort counts. As the Stewardship Campaign begins, I’m asking two things. First, please increase your pledge, according to your current ability. I am grateful for your continual generosity and together we will make every dollar count, like seeds falling into good soil. Second, prayerfully consider your role with our community garden. What energizes you and brings you joy at First Churches? What gifts and time can you share with us? We invite you to attend the Asking Budget meeting this Sunday, May 3 and the Annual Meeting on June 14. Together, inch by inch, row by row, we can make this garden grow.

With gratitude,  
Pastor Todd and the Stewardship Committee



## **CROP WALK 2015 A SUCCESS!!!**

Our CROP walk went well, with 39 walkers and rockers participating. We raised a little more money than last year- Totals will be announced Sunday, May 3<sup>rd</sup> at Worship! (If you still want to contribute or have outstanding pledges from people, we will continue to accept donations in person or online.)

The average amount raised per walker/rocker was \$99. Pat yourselves on the back, folks. Some of our walkers were children who did not raise money, and the average that Church World Service asks participants to raise is \$75.

This year, for the first time, we added a CROP Rock. Five of us rocked in front of the church during the walk and solicited donations. We raised over \$158 that way! It was fun, and raised a lot of awareness about CWS and CROP.

A group of students from UMass/Amherst participated in a unique fundraiser. The University prohibits anyone from soliciting funds in the residence halls, but the students collected soda cans after the spring concert and took donations of cans (and scavenged more in the common areas of two residence halls). They collected and redeemed 5,623 cans for a total of \$281.15!

Thank you to all of the groups that walked with us: Edwards Church, First Church of Hatfield (UCC), and Friends of Hampshire County Homeless. And to everyone who helped in any way by donating, raising money, walking, rocking, redeeming cans, setting up and/or donating food for the luncheon, cleaning up afterwards, and counting money at the end of the day. It takes a village!

Church World Service needs our help in responding to the devastating earthquake that struck Nepal last week. It mobilized staff and resources to assist communities immediately. With 200 staff on the ground already, they are responding with temporary shelter, food, hygiene kits, water, emergency health interventions, and more. Please help with a cash donation in the envelope provided or by check made out to First Churches, noting in the information line, Earthquake relief in Nepal.

Thank you from the Mission Board for your caring.

**The day and time for Mission meetings has changed to the first Thursday of the month at 4:30, beginning May 7.**

We're pleased to report that the One Great Hour of Sharing Offerings earned **\$175 for ABC** and **\$545 for UCC**. **\$180.17** was raised for the Interfaith Help Fund. **Thank you all for your generosity.**



Our weekly Survival Center collection has been dwindling during those snowy months. Canned and boxed items are needed for the increasing numbers of people needing food assistance in our area, as elsewhere. With summer vacation for the schools approaching, many children will be at home, needing healthy foods that are easy to use, such as dry cereal, peanut butter, canned tuna and chicken, canned pasta and sauce, soups, granola and breakfast bars, and 4- or 6-pack packages of raisins, fruit, and fruit juice.



## **FIRST CHURCHES PASTORAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE**

Sue Stone and David Entin, two members of the First Churches Pastoral Relations Committee, went to a regional UCC workshop on pastoral relations committee on February 24 in South Hadley. The workshop was led by Associate Conference Minister Wendy Vander Hart and covered the role of pastoral relations committees. The purpose of such committees is to foster a healthy relationship between the Pastor and the congregation in order to enhance the effectiveness of the church's mission. Functions include listening, support, understanding roles, communications link,

dealing with conflict, advocacy for Pastor, and assisting with both start-up and termination. The Committee should see that there is an evaluation process for the Pastor, usually done by the Deacons or Personnel committees, professional/spiritual development, and an annual compensation review. Our committee meets periodically with Pastor Todd and asks for feedback from the congregation that can be communicated. It does not accept anonymous messages, but encourages direct communication.

Church members are encouraged to provide feedback to the committee members at any time: Laura Judd, Sue Stone, Donna O'Meally, David Entin, and Sandy Hoover.



### **Returning to the Red Tent: An Intergenerational Creative Rediscovery of Wise Women from the Bible**

***Saturday, May 9, 2015 10:00am-2:00pm St. John's Episcopal Church, 48 Elm St.***

There are many wise, courageous, even fierce, women's voices found in both the Hebrew and Christian sacred texts--voices that have rarely been heard, stories that often transcend the boundaries of religion to speak to the timeless experiences of women's lives. Spend the morning discovering or rediscovering these women through personal reflection and sharing using a variety of creative expressions appropriate for women from ten to a hundred. You need not be "religious" nor "artistic" to participate, just eager to hear what these wise ones have to offer.

Cost: Sliding Fee Scale of \$10-50 per person, based on what you are comfortably able to pay. (Please let us know if this is a hardship and we will gladly work with you.) We will enjoy a potluck lunch, so please, bring some food to share.

Space is limited, so please sign up. For registration or questions, contact: Susannah Crolius, [scrolius@gmail.com](mailto:scrolius@gmail.com) or 413-348-2385.

## **NEW MEMBERS**

First Churches will welcome several new members on **Sunday, May 31**. There is always room for more. If you would like to know more about joining First Churches, please contact Pastor Todd or Pastor Sarah at [pastor@firstchurches.org](mailto:pastor@firstchurches.org).

## TIME TO TALK ABOUT THE FAIR

Meeting after church Sunday **June 7<sup>th</sup>** in the Parlor. All are welcomed to share comments on the 2014 Fair and offer suggestions for this November's fair. We need new ideas and new planning committee members. You are important to the fair. The fair is vital to the church and the committee needs more assistance than it has had in the past. Come be part of the action!

## THANK YOU!!!

Many thanks to everyone who participated in Cantata Sunday, April 19th!  
To the singers, the instrumentalists, the listeners, and everyone who contributed to the coffee hour--you were all important in making this happen, and I am very grateful!

With special appreciation, Dana

## Congregational Vital Signs

Evening Seminar @ First Churches

What are the essential qualities of a vital congregation? How do we avoid the pitfalls of being stuck in maintenance activities instead of being engaged in mission? What is the role of vision and mission statements in creating energy and clarity for congregations? Let's find out!

Don Remick, our UCC Massachusetts Associate Conference Minister for Church Development, is leading a church vital signs seminar on Wednesday, **May 6 at 7 PM**. (Deacons are meeting at 6:30 for a brief business meeting.) Don is our specialist in congregational vitality, and will meet with us and a few other church members from nearby congregations. Please come for a thought provoking evening.

## HALLOWED GROUND

*First Churches Sanctuary, May 16<sup>th</sup> 2pm*

An Encore performance of a staged reading of Laura Harrington's *Hallowed Ground*. Award-Winning playwright Harrington's body of work explores the human cost of war. *Hallowed Ground* is set in Georgia, October 1964, in the aftermath of Sherman's March to the Sea.

Four people are caught in the path of his army, each facing the destruction of the world they know.

The play is about crossing borders, the search for forgiveness, the hope for redemption and the strength of the human spirit in the face of utter desolation.

Directed by August Company co-founder Liesel de Boor, with original music composed by Peter de Boor, and a sound landscape created by UMass sound designer Amy Altadonna, the reading features Robyn Sutton-Fernandez as Micah, who is freed by the army but bound to the only land and family she has known; Cait Griffin as Lizzie, the only survivor of the family that enslaved Micah, newly discovered to be her sister; Jim Nutter as Jack, a Union soldier who in a moment of grace chooses not to shoot a young conscripted confederate, and takes a fatal bullet in the pause; and Ben Finn, as that saved soldier who will not rest until he can find in the battlefield of the fallen and thank him for his life.

Hallowed Ground captures Micah's first moments of freedom, and the profound complexities of her new life. Given the current conversations about race and the legacy of slavery, it's not only a play for reflection on this 150th anniversary of the end of The Civil War, it is a searing spotlight on what many consider to be an unhealed wound. In addition, the play raises profound questions about God, our purpose in life and God's plan.

## SPRING SUNDAYS ARE BLOOMING WITH ACTIVITY!

**May 3** - Asking Budget Presentation after church

**May 10** - Mother's Day

**May 17** - Haiti Presentation after service

**May 24** - Pentecost Sunday (Memorial Day Weekend)

**May 31** - New Members Sunday

**June 7** - Confirmation Sunday  
Church Fair Meeting after service

**June 14** - Annual Meeting after service

**June 21** - Children's Sunday

## HAMPSHIRE ASSOCIATION ANNUAL MEETING!!

The Hampshire Association Executive Committee, UCC would like to invite everyone from your church to be a part of the Annual Meeting to be held at Look Park on **Sunday June 7, 2015 from 1-4 PM** at the Dow Pavillion. There will be a potluck lunch at 1 PM and we encourage you to bring a dish to share. We will provide beverages, dishes and cutlery. There will be worship and singing followed by a short business meeting at 2:30 PM. If you are not a delegate you may go off and enjoy the park during the business meeting. We encourage family participation as there are activities for children as well. If any questions, contact Judy Stone at [413-320-3339](tel:413-320-3339) or [jstone9074@aol.com](mailto:jstone9074@aol.com)

## The Art & Soul Summer Series, 2015:

### Art making with a purpose

### Create...reflect...share

Friday Afternoon Art Wind Down

June 19, 26, July 10, 17, 24, 31, August 7, 14, 21,

**Friday afternoons, 3-5pm**

First Churches Rec Room, 129 Main Street,  
Northampton (come in through door on Center Street)

"Art washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life." (Pablo Picasso)

Relax. Wind down your week. Wash away the dust. Eat snacks. Make art. Each week will be a new art-making form and focused around a particular theme. Come for one session or them all.

Suggested Donation per session: \$10-20, but pay what you can.

June, 2015

Northampton Arts Night Out:

**Friday, June 12, 5-8pm**, front lawn of First Churches,  
129 Main Street, Northampton

Community Art: Making a Communal Box of Lament  
...Come help create and decorate a giant "Box of Lament" that will be used in a future art installation. These are challenging days, so feel free to contribute your own lament to the Box.

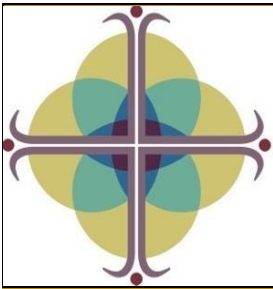
If raining, we will be inside the church

You do NOT need to be "artistic" nor "creative" to participate in any of these workshops. No one will be "judging" your work, I promise. Art & Soul workshops are about the materials and the process.

These workshops, while held in church spaces, have no religious agenda to them. Art & Soul recognizes and nurtures the many expressions and experiences of spirituality. We are grateful to First Churches of Northampton and First Congregational Church of Montague for their generosity in donating space to Art & Soul.

The cost of each workshop is on a sliding fee scale, meaning there is a range of suggested payment based on what you can comfortably pay. Some bartering will be considered.

If you are able, consider offering some extra scholarship funds for someone for whom the cost of a workshop would be prohibitive.



# MAY 2015



Sun.	Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thu.	Fri.	Sat.
					1. 6:00 Movie Night 6:00 Hilltown Charter 7:00 Choir Practice	2. 11:00 Hamp Pride
3. 10:00 Worship & Sunday School 11:30 Asking Budget Meeting 5:00 Cathedral in The Night ⚪ George Dole ⚪ Lise Gray	4. 12:00 Bible Study	5. 12:00 Peace Vigil	6. 6:30 Deacons 7:00 Congregational Vital Signs (See pg 6)	7. 4:30 Missions 6:00 Common Ground ⚪ Todd Emrick	8. 7:00 Choir Practice <a href="#">Arts Night Out</a>	9.
10. 10:00 Worship & Sunday School 5:00 CITN	11. 12:00 Bible Study 7:00 Peace & Justice	12. 12:00 Peace Vigil 1:00 Prayer Shawl Ministry, Parlor	13. 12:30 Finance 6:30 Trustees	14. 12:30 Dorcas Luncheon @ BrewMaster's Meeting to follow lunch	15. 7:00 Choir Practice	16. 2:00 Hallowed Ground
17. 10:00 Worship & Sunday School Rev. Sarah Buteux Preaching 11:30 Haiti Presentation 5:00 CITN	18. 12:00 Bible Study ⚪ Christie Moulton	19. 12:00 Peace Vigil 6:30 Prayer Shawl Ministry at Jeanne Fenton's Home	20. 5:00 Christian Ed 7:00 Council 7:00 Welcome & Outreach	21. 6:00 Common Ground	22. 7:00 Choir Practice <b>JUNE Messenger Items Due</b>	23.
24. PENTECOST SUNDAY 10:00 Worship & Sunday School 5:00 CITN ⚪ Sandi Hoover ⚪ Jaden Geller	25. 12:00 Bible Study ⚪ Ann Rasmussen ⚪ Moira Chapman	26. 12:00 Peace Vigil	27. ⚪ Phoebe Wondolowski	28.	29.	30.
31. NEW MEMBER SUNDAY 10:00 Worship & Sunday School 5:00 CITN						



# MASSACHUSETTS CONFERENCE, UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST 216TH ANNUAL MEETING ~ JUNE 12-13, 2015

*“But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.” – 2 Corinthians 4:7*

Dear Members of the Massachusetts Conference, United Church of Christ,

The Annual Meeting is one of those rare opportunities to gather together with brothers and sisters of faith from places beyond our local church setting. We experience something of the breadth and depth of the Body of Christ – and know that we are part of something Big! Come to re-connect with friends, for the conversations, the worship, fellowship, and the business of the Conference. Come to learn and to be inspired by dynamic preaching. Come to celebrate, worship and be joyful together!

Your Annual Meeting Committee continues to think creatively about the meeting, and this year, like last, will involve an experiment or two. We are excited about our new venue at the University of Massachusetts (UMASS) Amherst with its great facilities, food, and opportunities to be outside from time to time. We hope you will join us!

**THEME** But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. – 2 Corinthians 4:7. Our Annual Meeting will be an opportunity to focus on the “treasure” – the glory of God, carried and made visible in particular ways in each person present, and in our work together as the Body of Christ.

**KEYNOTE SPEAKER AND PREACHER** The Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber is founding pastor of House for All Sinners and Saints, a Lutheran mission church in Denver, Colorado. She is a leading voice in the emergent church movement, and author of *Pastrix: the Cranky, Beautiful Faith of a Sinner & Saint* (Jericho, 2013). “The passion behind her words... is as deeply pastoral as it is God-drenched and liberating” (Phyllis Tickle). Learn more about Nadia at [www.nadiabolzweber.com](http://www.nadiabolzweber.com). Her Keynote Address will be open to the public, so invite your friends to join you for this part of the meeting!

**WORSHIP** Opening worship on Friday afternoon will draw us together and open us up to see the treasure all around us! Friday evening worship will feature a sermon by our keynote speaker. Closing worship on Saturday will include communion and our own Jim Antal, Minister and President, preaching.

**“TREASURE IN CLAY JARS”** – Stories of Transformation On Friday afternoon, breakout gatherings will hear and share stories of transformation, both personal and corporate. Hear hope-filled stories from other congregations, and share one of your own! The stories and testimonies heard last year were powerful and treasured by all who attended.

An optional Recognition Luncheon will be the occasion to honor 50-year ordinands, award recipients, those who have completed Christian Educator training, and others. By popular request, we are once again offering a “Recognition Luncheon Only” registration option for friends and family of honorees.

**NEW LOCATION** Our new site at University of Massachusetts, Amherst offers two options for lodging, and award-winning campus-style food service. Please read carefully about your choices before completing your registration.

We look forward to seeing you in beautiful Amherst on June 12th and 13th! Grace and Peace, Ian Holland, Moderator Anne Cabbage, Vice-Moderator

**Come to re-connect with friends, for the conversations, the worship, fellowship, and the business of the Conference. Come to learn and to be inspired by dynamic preaching. Come to celebrate, worship and be joyful together!**



*“Nadia Bolz-Weber has probably done more than any other pastor in recent times to poke therapeutic fun at the misdemeanors and flaws of overlychurched Christianity and Christians. The passion behind her words, however, is as deeply pastoral as it is Goddrenched and liberating....thus the affection as well as the respect that attend her and her work wherever she goes.”*

*- Phyllis Tickle*

**KEYNOTE SPEAKER** Our keynote speaker will be the Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber, the founding pastor of House for All Sinners and Saints, a Lutheran mission church in Denver, Colorado. The Rev. Bolz-Weber is a leading voice in the emerging church movement. Her writing can be found in *The Christian Century* and the Sarcastic Lutheran blog. She is author of *Pastrix: the Cranky, Beautiful Faith of a Sinner & Saint* (Jericho, 2013) and *Salvation on the Small Screen? 24 Hours of Christian Television* (Seabury 2008). We are so excited about our keynote speaker that we are opening her keynote address to the public! People coming to the meeting just for the Rev. Bolz-Weber’s presentation will need to register and pay on line (\$10 per person, or 3 for \$20, proceeds to New Ministry Initiatives within the Mass. Conference), and receive a ticket. (Parking will be in the Central Parking Area at a cost of \$1.50/hour.) We hope you will encourage your friends to join you in Amherst for this portion of the meeting. However, if you are registering for the Annual Meeting itself, **PLEASE DO NOT REGISTER SEPARATELY** for the keynote address. It is included with your overall registration.

Please consider attending the MACUCC Annual Meeting. There are registration packets available in Lyman Hall, or follow this [link](#) to register online. Brochures and the list of events and speakers is available online as well. Please let Vanessa know if you are interested in attending and need assistance with registration. 413-584-9392. You can learn more about the keynote speaker [here](#).