



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



SEPTEMBER 2015 PASTOR'S PAGE

Important Dates

Common Ground ~ 3rd & 17th
Krishna Das ~ 18th
Climate Action Forum ~ 21st
Candlelight Vigil ~ 23rd
Syrian Benefit Concert ~ 27th

Looking For.....

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As I write, I am shifting from “kayak mode,” slowly paddling around the Virginia waterways, into “motorboat mode” as the Fall program year approaches. Let me take a minute to say it has been a great summer, a Spirit filled summer, at First Churches.

- It was fun to experiment with images and video in worship set in Lyman Hall. We had solid attendance and good energy all summer.
- [Common Ground](#) met all summer, gardening together and sharing meals of our own produce, and worship of our own labors.
- The Trustees completed numerous projects, like installing bird control netting on the Center Street entrance, new electrical wiring in the Chapel, supporting the Iglesia Bautista to install air conditioning, and preparing for major elevator repairs. Ernie painted both administrative offices!
- Sarah and I went to an energizing conference in August organized by the Center for Progressive Renewal, where we learned from many other church leaders about innovative renewal, worship and peace and justice projects.

Our whole staff is energized and preparing for a busy and exciting Fall. Here is a sample of the major events.

- [Sunday School](#) and Youth Group kicks off on Homecoming Sunday, September 13. Sarah has a great year planned, including Confirmation.
- A week of [environmental activities](#) coincides with the Papal visit to speak on climate change. The Peace and Justice Committee has been deeply involved in the Interfaith Climate Action group to bring this forward.
- I am looking forward to facilitating [Adult Bible Study](#), with a series called “Reading the Bible with Your Heart, Mind and Soul,” and the September sermon series on “What the World Needs Now” is in process.

- Dana has been selecting new music and is working on a youth bell choir.
- Vanessa is a proficient digital communicator, and learning more every day, so you know what is happening.
- At our [Annual Meeting](#) on September 20, we will review the final budget, celebrate the Organ Campaign, receive updates from the Tiffany Window Committee, and launch a year of “Holy Conversation” about our future.

I look forward to welcoming you to a new Fall Program in 2015! I think our unofficial theme should be, “Church is something we make together.” We have energy and vitality because of what you all bring to the mix. God moves among us, and often God’s hands are attached to your wrists! It is a privilege to stand in wonder and watch it all unfold. Thanks for being a part of all this, and I look forward to seeing you soon!

Pastor Todd

A NOTE FROM YOUR MODERATOR

Hello First Churches Family!

I hope this note finds you enjoying the still warm summer days and the clear nights and fireflies. We have had a great summer at First Churches. And look forward to continued activity and growth as we enter the harvest season.

Early in the Fall, we will begin a dialog to determine how we want to structure ourselves to best support our Mission and Vision. It's an exciting time for a lot of reasons. Our gifts are becoming more well-known in the community. We have new people adding voice and song to some of our oldest traditions. First Churches continues to live our history here in Northampton because of this congregation. And I love every part of that.

And so, as Moderator of First Churches, I make this, the first official announcement of the 2015 Annual Meeting. The meeting will be held after services on Sunday, September 21st, 2015. At this meeting, we will hand out the Annual Report with the final budget numbers for the 2014-2015 fiscal year. We will also talk about and outline the upcoming Dialog sessions. And we'll discuss nominations and the committee slate for the up-coming year.

I wish you all a great rest of the summer.

Donna M. O'Meally

SUNDAY SCHOOL & YOUTH PROGRAMS

Hello Everyone,

The summer is winding down and things at church are picking up. Here's some of what you need to know to get our school year off to a great start. **Sunday School will start September 13th with registration at 9:30am.** We'll have munchkins and fruit available down in the Sunday School rooms that morning so kids can enjoy a little snack while you fill out their forms and they meet their teachers.

Please let me know if your children will be participating in Sunday school this year. I will be ordering curriculum and supplies in the next week and it would be very helpful to have a sense of how many kids plan to participate. And please know that friends are always, always, always welcome.

Teachers

At First Churches we are blessed with lots of kids eager to learn on Sunday morning. But that blessing come with a responsibility to provide them with the best children's ministry we can offer. We have a great curriculum, 4 beautiful classrooms, and the kids to fill them, but in order to make this program fly we really need teachers. I am looking for help in every classroom from the Rainbow Room (nursery) through 6th grade. If you know of anyone, even outside the church, who might be interested, please let me know.

And if you are hoping to help out in any capacity, well first let me just say, "thank you!"



Second, it would be lovely if you could join us for an **orientation on September 6th** right after church. We'll use that time to familiarize you with our curriculum and the classrooms, we can start to fill in the teaching schedule for Fall, and you'll have a chance to complete a CORI form to keep us in line with our safe church policy. If you can't make it on the 6th but would still like to help, just let me know and I'll set up a time to speak with you.

Our mission is to help our children grow in the way of Jesus and explore their faith and personal values, by fostering critical thinking skills in a fun and safe environment. With your help we can do this and make a difference in the lives of our children.

Thank you and blessings upon you all,

Pastor Sarah

COMMON GROUND

Brokenness.

I don't know exactly why or where we'll go with it yet, but that's the theme God has laid on my heart for our gathering this coming Thursday, September 3. Come join us as we:

Cook and set-up from 5-6

Eat and worship from 6-7

Clean up from 7-7:30

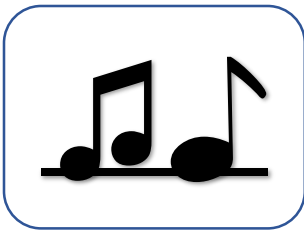
and then enjoy Common Ground After Dark at the Foundry
(where the conversation continues...)

If you can come Thursday- and I hope you can - bring something little (a watch, a necklace, a vase, a toy) that's broken. And if the theme inspires something in you - a poem, a thought, a song - let me know. You can e-mail, call, or better yet meet me in the garden Sunday night at 5:00. We'll water, weed, and plan out worship. Everyone's welcome. And speaking of our garden, there's so much coming up that I think we'll make two soups.

Come Cultivate a Peace,
Pastor Sarah



JOIN THE CHOIR!!



If you enjoy singing, please consider becoming part of our choir! There are no auditions, and we do have a lot of fun together!! Rehearsals are on Friday evenings from 7:00 – 8:30 and on Sunday mornings at 9:00. We will begin meeting on Friday, September 11, and will sing for the service for the first time this season on September 13th. Choir membership is open to upper-elementary age children, teenagers, elders, and anyone in between! We hope you'll be willing to give it a try! Please speak with any choir member or Dana (727-8677 or dana@elytra.net).

SUNDAY WORSHIP THEMES:

WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS NOW

September 6: Finding Faith with Other Faiths;
How a Multi-faith Awakening is Reshaping our Loyalties

September 13: Homecoming Sunday
Still Talking About Jesus;
How Jesus is still relevant in a pluralistic world

September 20: We Are Not in Charge;
The Next Wave of Being an Open and Affirming Church

September 27: Creation Sunday
We are Responsible for Life on Earth;
What Jonathan Edwards Might Think about Climate Change



CONCERT IN SUPPORT OF REFUGEE RELIEF

The Valley Syrian Relief Committee Presents *Songs for Syria* on Sunday, September 27th, 3:00 pm in First Churches, 129 Main Street, Northampton

After four years of war, half of Syria's people have fled their homes and are living in deplorable and dangerous conditions, many without access to food, shelter, and much-needed medical care. The United Nations has called this the worst humanitarian crisis since World War II.

The Valley Syrian Relief Committee is hosting a concert to raise funds for medical aid for Syrian refugees. The concert is free, The Valley Syrian Committee will be requesting donations for the Syrian American Medical Society. The funds will be used to provide medical



services, replace bombed hospitals, train medical personal and purchase medical supplies.

The concert will feature a special performance by the highly acclaimed Layaali Arabic Music Ensemble with Syrian guest artists, as well as remarks by Dr. A.F. Elshaar, President of the New England Chapter of The Syrian American Medical Society. Local civil liberties lawyer, radio personality and author Bill Newman will emcee.

First Churches is pleased to be a cosponsor of this event.

For more information contact:

The Valley Syrian Relief Committee
Phone: Michael Kane - [413-586-0403](tel:413-586-0403)
Email: valleysyrianrelief@gmail.com

MONDAY NOON BIBLE STUDY – BEGINNING SEPTEMBER 14

“How to Read the Bible with All Your Mind, Heart and Soul”

There is no one way to read the Bible, and it is best to read it several different ways. When I preach, I often use four different ways of reading scriptures to open different levels of meaning. We will explore together the follow four ways for a week each:

~ Reading the Bible as literature helps us remember that there is a story behind the story. Jesus doesn't just show up from nowhere and start preaching. The Gospels come from a rich matrix of tradition, including Moses and the Exodus, the prophets, and exile and conquest of Israel and Judah. Reading a text out of context limits the possibilities.

~ Knowing some historical context and basic timeline helps in this process. The Bible is not just full of spiritual sayings, it is full of community conflicts, politics and questions about the nature and will of God set in a time and place.

~ Word studies can help reveal richer understandings. What do words like love, grace or faith really mean? How are these words used in different places in the Bible? (Continued next page...)

~ Reading the Bible devotionally is also important. We are not reading scriptures just for information, but to experience transformation. Reading the Psalms, reading and praying as Lectio Divina, and integrating scriptures into a prayer life, and sharing together in a group about how it speaks to us are meaningful parts to letting scripture speak to us.

Join us any Monday at Noon in my study. We will meet all year except for holidays. Future topics may include reading the four Gospels in Parallel, parables, Creation theology, diversity in the Bible, and learning from Moses For example we could spend a week on how to read the Bible as literature, the role of historical settings on different parts of the Bible, word studies and devotional readings of scripture.

Pastor Todd

≈ PEACE & JUSTICE ≈



LOCAL Interfaith Eco-Actions

The Interfaith Eco-Action Community welcomes all faith-based individuals to join us in taking action to help mitigate climate disruption. We now mobilize around Pope Francis's US visit and have plans into 2016. Join us!

Sept. 21 @ 7pm: Community Forum on the Papal Encyclical at First Churches Northampton:

A panel of religious leaders from the Catholic, Protestant and Jewish faith traditions will share their perspectives on the critical importance of Pope Francis' recent papal letter and his call for Climate Justice. Panelists are Professor Craig Nicholson, Reverend Dr. Andrea Ayzajian, and Rabbi David Seidenberg

Sept. 23 @ 8:15pm: Interfaith Candlelight Vigil in solidarity with DC Yom Kippur Vigil prior to Pope Francis' congressional address. First Churches Meeting House in Northampton

Sept. 24 @ 7pm: Area Watch Parties of Pope Francis' Congressional Address – see below for Watch Party sites details. This historic event will be rebroadcast in Longmeadow, Northampton, and Amherst with rich discussion afterwards

Sept. 24 @ 7pm: Watch Party Sites: St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Northampton; St. Mary's Church Longmeadow Unitarian Universalist, Amherst

Sept. 26-7: Interfaith Clergy and Choirs Preaching and Singing About Climate – All Faith Communities

Sept. 27 @12:30: Interfaith Community Singing Action – First Churches, Northampton

HARVESTING HOPE PROCLAMATION

As the autumn season turns and the earth yields her fruits of summer labor, we gather. We gather with the purpose of harvesting hope, to come together in community and envision a sustainable future. We are guided by the concept of Shmita, the ancient biblical wisdom that encourages us to t the land a Sabbath one year out of every seven; to deeply rest from production; to cancel debts, to take down fences, to share the land, to bring the slow living of the Sabbath to an entire year and deepen our trust that the whole world is filled his deep breath of a year reminds us that there are no greater blessings than the gift of good land and fresh air; clear cool water and the changing glories of sun and shade. This deep breath of a year reminds us that all living beings are interwoven with earth, air and water; flowers of the field are interwoven; trees of the forest are interwoven; stones of the earth are interwoven and our actions carry real and meaningful consequence. We gather to find ways to bring these values into the next six years; to deepen Sabbath Mindfulness in our society.

Hakhel in Hebrew means gather and assemble. In the Biblical tradition, Hakhel was the moment at the end of the Shmita year, the Sabbatical year, when the whole people would gather in Jerusalem and listen to the King read the passages from Scripture that limited his power. Drawing from this ancient well of wisdom, we

assemble together. We assemble to harvest the power from our diverse spiritual and cultural traditions to remind our governments, our corporations and ourselves that all life is important. Even kings, presidents, legislators and corporate executives can not rule the very Source of Life that provides for us all.

Together we gather so we will not forget, or fall asleep in comfortable living rooms and feign ignorance of the violence our wealth is perpetrating. The sudden weather calamities, the extinction of species upon species, the everyday use of dangerous chemicals, the spread of poverty and injustice across the planet destroying neighborhoods, communities and now, whole nations. We gather together and commit to feel so that we may act, we may dream and we may hope.

On this autumn day we remember what our ancestors always knew: blessings continuously flow from this Earth drawing us into wonder; calling us into responsible action. We renew ourselves by reading our holy texts together and sharing our sacred stories aloud; speaking the truth we carry and planning street actions for protest and celebration. On this autumn day we gather and go forward as neighbors and citizens to harvest hope. We are ready to begin again; to plant and sow; and to be active partners helping bring the sustainable and regenerative future we all hope for.

If not now, when? If not us, who? If not here, where?

Written by Maggid David Arfa and the Harvesting Hope Proclamation Committee, August 2015; Elul 5775

THE FAIR IS COMING!!! GET READY!!!!

The Annual Church Fair will take place on November 21st. Please keep an eye out for ways you can help, contact Vanessa in the Church Office with any questions.

THE 12TH ANNUAL HOT CHOCOLATE RUN

Save the Date! December 6, 2015

The Hot Chocolate Run is a community celebration of Safe Passage, the Hampshire County organization addressing domestic violence. The Hot Chocolate Run has grown dramatically since its first year in 2004. This year, we expect 6,000 participants in our 5K road race, 5K fun run, and 3K walk. Every runner and walker will enjoy a mug of homemade hot chocolate at the finish line!

Participants join us year after year for a fun and festive start to the holiday season.

They participate to spend time with family and friends, to run a challenging 5K course with serious competitors, to enjoy hot chocolate,

and most importantly, to support Safe Passage and our important programs for survivors of domestic violence.

Every one of our participants has the opportunity to make a big difference for people who have lived with domestic violence. We hope you'll join us this year—and that you'll sign up to Step Up for Safe Passage. Together, we can expand possibilities and opportunities for people living with abuse.



Hilary Price

Registration starts this month—Click [here](#) to find out how you can sign up.

SUPER SATURDAY ~

October 17, 2015 8:00am - 3:30pm

[Register HERE Now!](#)

Featuring Dr. Marcia McFee

Don't miss this opportunity to hear Dr. Marcia McFee. Marcia is an author, worship designer and leader, professor, preacher and artist. Her engaging and interactive style has been called "refreshing," "inspiring," and "unforgettable." Marcia's passion for helping the church to worship God fully is especially directed toward the education of local congregations.

Workshops can be seen [here](#)

Participants will be able to attend two 90-minute workshops related to various aspects of church life, mission and ministries, one in the morning and one in the afternoon.

In addition, participants can attend a 30-minute table conversation or forum during one of the mid-day lunch periods. See descriptions inside this brochure and register early, as spaces will fill.

Be Green! We encourage attendees to carpool and to bring their own reusable water bottles and/or travel mugs.

Cost: \$54 per person or \$44 per person in church groups of 5 or more who register at the same time. Registration deadline is October 5, 2015.

TRASH TO TREASURES

Saturday, Sept 12th on the Amherst Town Common, 9am – 3pm

Trash to Treasures is an annual used furniture sale benefitting the [Amherst Survival Center](#). Decorate your apartment, dorm room or home with a recycled piece of furniture at well below retail prices. All proceeds benefit the Amherst Survival Center's programs serving nearly 6,000 of our neighbors in Hampshire and Franklin Counties.

The ASC is still accepting donations of gently used furniture and will pick up items for a small fee. For more information, you can call the ASC at 413-549-3968 x308 or email furniture@amherstsurvival.org.

CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGE

CIEE is currently seeking host families in the greater Hampshire Region area for a few international high school students who will be studying at Holyoke High School, Northampton High School, & Easthampton High School this August.

Bianca is a 17 year old girl from ITALY.

Jose is a 16 year old boy from MEXICO.

Mathilda is a 17 year old girl from ITALY.

Lorenzo is a 17 year old boy from ITALY.

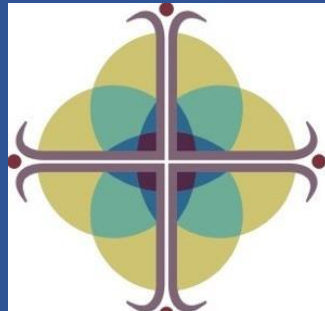
CIEE accepts all types of host families (Kids, no kids, empty nesters, single adults, etc.) All that is required is to provide the student with an accepting family environment, a bed to sleep in, 3 meals a day, and help with transportation arrangements.

Our students arrive fully equipped with the appropriate visa information, medical insurance, and spending money. To learn more about our program or about becoming a host family, visit our website. You may also start an application today!

Thank you in advance for your kindness and support!

Warmest Regards,

David Suda
Outreach Coordinator, USA High School
300 Fore Street, Portland, ME 04101
email dsuda@ciee.org
tel .207.239.9233
fax .207.274.5648
web ciee.org/highschool/
web ciee.org/host/



September 2015

Sun.	Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thu.	Fri.	Sat.
		1.	2. 7:00 Deacons	3. 4:30 Missions 5:30 Common Ground	4.	5.
6. 10:00 Worship & Sunday School 5:00 Cathedral in The Night	7. 7:00 Peace & Justice	8. 12:00 Peace Vigil	9. 6:30 Trustees 6:30 Missions	10. 12:30 Finance 6:30 Missions	11. 7:00 First Night of Choir Practice	12.
13. 10:00 Worship & Sunday School Gathering Sunday 5:00 CITN	14. 12:00 Bible Study	15. 12:00 Peace Vigil 1:00 Prayer Shawl Ministry, Parlor	16. 7:00 Council	17. 5:30 Common Ground	18. 7:00 Choir Practice 7:30 Krishna Das	19.
20. 10:00 Worship & Sunday School All Church Business Meeting 5:00 CITN	21. 12:00 Bible Study 7:00 Climate Action Forum	22. 12:00 Peace Vigil October Messenger Items Due	23. 8:00 Candlelight Vigil	24.	25. 7:00 Choir Practice	26.
27. 10:00 Worship & Sunday School 3:00 Syria Concert 5:00 CITN	28. 12:00 Bible Study	29.	30.			