

The Beacon

FEBRUARY 2016



GOOD NEWS from

United Congregational Church of Westerly

United Church of Christ, Pawcatuck, CT

Sunday Worship ~ 9:30 am

FROM THE PASTOR ...

"Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he vanished from their sight."

Luke 24:31

At first glance, the sentence above could come from any story – a news report, a murder mystery, a science fiction or spy thriller. Without knowing who the "they" is or who the "he" is, the significance of the sentence is invisible. It points to something curious, amazing or mysterious, but without the facts behind the words, it serves only to intrigue us. Who did they recognize and why had they not recognized the mysterious man before? Once they did figure out who he was, why did he then vanish so suddenly? This simple sentence raises a whole lot of questions and without knowing the rest of the story we can't possibly answer them. But we want to.

That's why this sentence summarizes so perfectly the essence of the life of faith. These words capture beautifully a split second in time during which two men are confronted with the unexpected reality of new life in the face of death. During this split second, the world shifts for these two men and they are never the same. Followers of Jesus, these two are hurrying out of Jerusalem in the aftermath of Jesus' horrible death, making the decision to get out of town before something

happens to them too. But they've also heard the rumors of an empty tomb. So it's no surprise that when they encounter a stranger who seems to know nothing of what's happened, the three of them chat about it all for the rest of the long walk to Emmaus. When the two men reach their destination, they invite the stranger to eat with them. He agrees and, once at table with them, he picks up the bread and blesses it. In that instant they recognize him. It is the resurrected Jesus, right there with them and it had been all along! In that moment of recognition, Jesus vanishes leaving them to absorb that the story of the empty tomb was not just a dream or a rumor. It was a new kind of truth that changed everything.

This kind of moment of deep, life changing clarity about Jesus and what he means to one's relationship with God is not often front and center in how we Congregationalists tend to think of faith. We are not, generally speaking, big on conversion experiences which are how some would describe these moments of deep knowing of the role God plays in one's life. Truth is, I think we all have those moments – many, actually, in the course of a lifetime – when we just know God is paying attention to us. We know what it is to see Jesus as more than a tiny baby in a Christmas crèche or a beaten and bruised body hung on a cross. We know who Jesus is to us AND we know Jesus knows who we are, in our beautiful moments and the ugly ones. In these rare moments of knowing God's grace clicks deep down inside us and we have a glimmer of what it is to be a Christian, a follower of Jesus. We are inspired to try to live life in the light of that truth.

Lent is, at its core, the search for such moments. This search requires a willingness to suspend, if only for a moment, our reliance on rationality and the need for everything in life to "make sense" according to certain rules. We must also be willing to risk others questioning how we could "believe" something so seemingly outlandish. Lent is an opportunity to do this work of exploring what it means to risk believing that God is real, that Jesus represents a whole new kind of truth revealing a whole new way to live, and that the Holy Spirit walks with us every step of the way on this journey through life. Lent, if we let it, can be our own walk to Emmaus during which encountering the risen Christ is a real possibility, if we are willing to let our eyes be opened.

So, I hope you will dare to jump into Lent 2016 with an open mind and an open heart, willing to risk being changed in that moment when your eyes are opened to the reality of Christ in your life, whatever that means to you. A "Lenten Experience" Guide for your explorations will be available on Ash Wednesday for your use at your leisure and in whatever way works for you. It is intended as a starting point, along with worship, for your own walk to Emmaus as you ponder the new life possible for you right here and right now. That's why this journey to Emmaus might be the pathway to your future, if you are willing to walk it. Remember, a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. And it's always nice to have a walking buddy or two...

Your friend and companion in Christ,
Rev. Ruth



CONFIRMATION REMINDERS

- Confirmation Class on **February 21** at **11 am** will be extended to make up for the missed class on January 31. Hopefully all Confirmands remembered that they are expected to attend the Annual Meeting rescheduled for that date in the wake of the snowstorm on January 23 – 24.
- A reminder to watch your email for details on the **Confirmation Retreat** at Irons Homestead the weekend of March 11 – 13. All Confirmands are expected to attend along with a parent and/or mentor.

READING THE BIBLE IN A WHOLE YEAR IS A WONDERFUL IDEA BUT we've decided to "shelve" this idea for the time being in favor of doing a congregational book study on exciting new possibilities for developing church growth strategies for our church. At its January

meeting, the Church Council agreed to sponsor this book study using the book *Real Good Church* by the Rev. Molly Phinney Baskette as our resource. We have ordered five copies which will be available for loan through the church office OR you can order your own copy (paperback or kindle version) through Amazon.com. We'll be gathering to discuss the book at a special "*Real Good Church Potluck Supper*" on Saturday, **March 19** so mark your calendars now and get reading! Details on the potluck will appear in the March *Beacon*.



February Birthdays

- 1 – Andy Schilke
- 6 – Heidi Schilke
- 7 – Dorothy Oehrle
- 9 – Jimmy Cornell
- 12 – Alice Dessaulles
- 17 – Katharine Tarasuk
- 20 – Nick Comito

Please add in your special days by calling the church office!

Conference Dues

The Rhode Island Conference of the United Church of Christ has voted to raise the per capita dues from \$18 to \$20. This decision was made after our offering envelopes were ordered. We do our best to meet this commitment, but also understand this is not possible for all. Feel free to adjust your contribution if possible. Thank you.

Annual Ladies' Night Dinner

sponsored by the Men's Club

Tuesday, February 9th
5:30 p.m. at **StoneRidge** –
Jerry Brown Rd in Mystic, CT

Tickets: \$30.00 each

Menu choices: *Beef Tenderloin, Grilled
Salmon, or Chicken Parmesan.*

**DEADLINE to sign up is Sunday,
January 31!** Please make your check out to
UCC Men's Club and give to Ed Stratton.

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Diaconate Schedule

<u>Date</u>	<u>Name & Telephone</u>
Feb 7	Elvis Torres (860) 599-5572
Feb 14	Lynn Murray (401) 539-7578
Feb 21	<i>to be determined at next meeting</i>
Feb 28	<i>to be determined at next meeting</i>

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ASH WEDNESDAY SERVICE
Wednesday, February 10 @ 7 pm

Join us for a unique service of prayer,
meditation and the imposition of ashes as we
begin Lent, the time in the Christian year when
we consider intentionally who we are and who
God needs us to be.

OLD FASHIONED VALENTINE TEA



Sunday, February 14th

2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Come and enjoy

*Delicate Tea Sandwiches,
Cookies, Fancy Pastries, Fresh Scones,
and a variety of Beverages.*

Tickets: \$10.00 each

***Please purchase tickets ahead of time ~
Reservations required!***

You can call Linda Evans (860) 599-
5066 or Judy Bartlett (860) 599-5486 or the
office (860) 599-1226 for reservations or
tickets. Then please mail in your check
(payable to the United Congregational Church).
This will guarantee that you won't be waiting in
line for a seat! Thank you.

Please **sign up** on the sign-up sheets
on the table in Fellowship Hall. Volunteers will
be needed to make pastries, donate chicken,
tuna, ham, or eggs, be waitresses or waiters,
work in the kitchen, help set-up for tea, and
clean up on Sunday.

MUSIC NEWS



***YOU ARE INVITED TO
An Open Meeting of the
Music Committee
Sunday, February 7th
@ 11 am in the parlor***

Join us as we chat about our Music
Program and how we'd like to expand it. PLUS
we'd love to brainstorm ideas on a Spring
Concert!! Everyone welcome!

Mission Moments



Children's Underwear Collection for grades K—3

The local elementary schools have put out a plea for children's underwear for both boys and girls ages 5—8. We will divide the bounty among the elementary schools in Pawcatuck and Westerly and local charities such as the PNC and the Johnny Cake Center.

The **WARM Meal in February** will be provided by the Membership, Stewardship, Flower, and Lay Life and Work Committees

Looking Ahead

March



Ready, Set, Go!!!

The first Annual Fill the Pews Competition!!

Let's get that competitive spirit flowing!! During the month of March we will see which side of our congregation can fill the pews with the most visitors and non-perishable goods! The front pews will be reserved for non-perishable items for the PNC and the rest of the pews will be open for visitors that YOU will invite to join us! Which side will win?? Start practicing now!!

The **March WARM meal** will be provided by the Men's Club.

Thanks for all your help! Please speak to any member of the Missions Committee with your ideas and questions —*Melissa Stratton, Dixie Lufbery, Sandi Davis, Peter Hainsworth, Claire Calabretta, Darla Rines or Kathy Sugar.*



YES! *continues its unique opportunities for intergenerational learning in February with sessions scheduled for the 7th, the 21st and the 28th!*

An art/service project will be the focus on the 7th as the participants make Valentine Cards for our folks in need of a little Valentine cheer under the expert guidance of Becky Morrone and Shirin Platt. You won't want to miss this one! Exploring Lent from a kid perspective will take center stage for the rest of February.

2016 SUNDAY WORSHIP BULLETINS

This special ministry of the church includes the regular Sunday bulletins and also bulletins that are purchased for special times during the church year (Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, etc.) as well as funeral bulletins. Of course we also have the cost of paper for the regular bulletins and the toner and "wear & tear" on the copier machine to consider. For \$30.00 you can provide bulletins for an **entire month** for your church family. Please sign up on the sign-up sheet that has been posted near the Flower Chart in Fellowship Hall. Make a check out to the church for the bulletins. Thank you.



ALMOST IRON CHEF
Rescheduled for
Saturday, February 20th
5:30 pm

We are excited to announce that we have finally succeeded in negotiating February 20 as the new date for this year's Almost Iron Chef cooking competition event! So get ready to enjoy the culinary talents of our members as well as folks from the community as our amateur chefs gear up to compete once again.

The Key Ingredient is coconut! The categories for dishes are Appetizer, Main Course, Side Dish and Dessert. And do realize coconut in any form is acceptable—coconut water, coconut milk, essence of coconut, etc. and of course, shredded coconut!

Registration for competitors and ticket sales for tasters is still open! Competitors are urged to preregister since there is limited space for them. Tickets for competitors and tasters will be \$10 again this year. And once again, one ticket = one official AIC ballot! No charge for children age 6 and under.

Watch for additional AIC details in the Weekly Email Update, the weekly Sunday morning bulletin and the Facebook page!

Some Capital Campaign Updates:

- The Trustees are working on securing bids for the roofing work which needs to be done, as well as recommendations on how to approach this significant project.
- Sandi Davis & Lynn Murray are working with Pastor Ruth to pursue grant funding for an Automatic Defibrillator for the church.

- The first matching gift drive for Rev. Kathleen's \$2500 gift to the Campaign will take place during Lent. Over \$1500 has already been contributed to this cause through the anonymous donation of the funding for the "railing-like fence" on the new walkway to the lower level. What might you do to help us match this gift?

BOOKS IN THE PARLOR!



"Books in the Parlor" will be front and center in our **Lenten study options** as we meet to discuss our current book selection, *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban* by Malala Yousafzai. This is a best-selling book which is available for purchase online and in stores. It is also easily obtained through the library. The original date for this conversation – February 22nd – will be shifting so keep watching for the latest details!

Storm Closing Information



If we have a cancellation at the church due to severe weather, the cancellation will appear on **Channel 8 in Connecticut** and **Channels 6, 10, and 12 in Rhode Island**. You will also receive an emergency email from Pastor Ruth. You can also call the church office (860-599-1226) to hear a special recorded message announcing any cancellation plans.



MISSION TRIP 2016

A New Twist!

As many of you are aware, we have enjoyed two very successful congregational mission trips the last two summers based in “The Providence Experience” at Irons Homestead in northern Rhode Island. Our focus was to understand better the issues of homelessness and food insecurity right in our own area. These trips have been amazing offering unique opportunities to travel and learn together even as we deepened our relationships with God and each other. BUT, these wonderful experiences have been limited to a few people for any number of practical reasons.

In discussing this reality at its recent meeting, the Missions Committee came up with the wonderful idea of offering a Mission Trip experience to a broader audience through a variety of “day trip” opportunities over the course of the summer. Some of the ideas on the table for these day trips include:

- A return to the Abbey of Regina Laudis in Bethlehem, CT to experience firsthand the interweaving of the rhythms of daily life grounded in prayer and sustainable agriculture.
- A journey to Ground Zero in New York City as one way to understand how Muslim Christian relationships in this country have become what they are.
- A visit to a local Muslim Mosque to learn the truth of genuine Islam as a religion of peace and tolerance.
- A Sunday morning visit to the Friendship Breakfast at Mathewson Street Church in Providence to work and experience firsthand the reality of homelessness in our cities.
- A work day at one of the area farms which grows produce for the local food

pantries to support those important efforts in tangible ways.

- A train trip to the Semitic Museum and others at Harvard University in Boston to see firsthand artifacts from the amazing history of our living faith.

These are just a few of the ideas we are considering. Do you have others? Which ones are you willing to help organize? Speak with Rev. Ruth or any member of the Missions Committee and let’s all enjoy some wonderful “Mission Days” this summer!!

THE FUTURE OF THE RHODE ISLAND CONFERENCE UCC

is in the hands of all of us. We must do the hard work of figuring out – discerning – what that means and what new possibilities could look like. Join with members and pastors from some of our sister churches at a regional meeting scheduled for 7-9 pm on Sunday, March 6 at Kingston Congregational Church, UCC (2610 Kingstown Road, Kingston, RI). Sign-up sheet for this meeting will go up mid-February at church. Other meetings are happening around the state as well so if you would like to participate but can’t make this time, please check with me for other dates and locations. For any questions in the meantime, please speak with either Peter Hainsworth (Past President of the RICUCC) or myself (Rev. Ruth).



Please pray for the following members and friends of our church:

Barbara	Madelyn Stratton
Sandi Davis	Fred
Jeff	Catherine
Debbie	Jim
Millie Silver	Carole Kus
Shirley Harrington	Lisa
Beverly & Family	Beverly
John Dillon	Brian Madill
Sheryl	David Jones
Doris	Jennifer Clancon
Eugene Ravenelle	Kim Brown
Karen & Bill	Hope
Shirley M.	Timothy Nugent
Scott & his parents	Gerry
William Underhill III	
Family of Gary Dobson	
Connie	Nicci & Jeff
Bob & Ann	Sharon Brooks
Allie	Family of Doris Whitehead

If you would like anyone added or removed from this list for the next newsletter, please call the office or let one of our deacons know. Thank you.

OUR STAFF

Pastor: The Rev. Ruth Shilling Hainsworth

Organist: David Cranmer

Sunday School Contact Persons: Tanya Sylvestre
and Susan Lanphere

Secretary: Susan Perreault

Sexton: Debby Johnson

CHURCH OFFICE SPECIFICS

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Office Hours: Monday, Thursday, & Friday
from 8:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.