

From the Pastor...

“Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness where for 40 days he was tempted.” -- Luke 4:1-2

Lent will be upon us early this year as Easter is falling almost as early as it can. For all of you who have wondered why the date for Easter is not fixed like Christmas, here's the explanation. At the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE it was established by the church (there was only one at this point in history – what we now know as the Roman Catholic Church) that the date for Easter would be the first Sunday following the first full moon after the vernal equinox (the “Paschal Full Moon”). Since we follow the Gregorian calendar, we observe the vernal equinox on March 21 meaning that Easter can fall anywhere between March 22 and April 25. Interestingly, the Eastern Orthodox churches follow the Julian calendar so their vernal equinox corresponds to April 3 on our calendar. Thus, their celebration can fall anywhere between April 4 and May 8. The observation of Passover is also linked to the vernal equinox by a very complex formula. This is why Easter is sometimes very close to if not overlapping Passover and at other times, not so much.

However it came to be, the calendar date for the beginning of Lent this year is Wednesday, February 13. This will be the date for our annual Ash Wednesday service. A simple, brief and deeply spiritual service, Ash Wednesday is the time we come together to remind ourselves that for the next 40 days we make an extra effort to reflect on our relationship with God. We work a little harder to figure out what it is God is doing in our lives, and more importantly, how we are to respond to the reality of God's presence in our lives. As we do this important spiritual “spade work” we are following once again in the footsteps of Jesus who, as soon as he emerged from the waters of the Jordan at his baptism, left for a period of prayer and meditation in the wilderness.

Many of the ways we traditionally observe Lent come from the story about Jesus in the wilderness. For example, Luke states that Jesus did not eat for the 40 days and from this came the Lenten tradition of fasting one day a week. Related to this is the tradition of not eating meat on Fridays during Lent which gave rise to the fish and chips specials in our favorite restaurants so common in our area on Fridays to this day. In the gospel story we also learn of Jesus

being tempted by the devil with food, with personal power and with superhuman abilities, all of which Jesus refused. So, we are encouraged during Lent to practice turning away from whatever tempts us by giving up something we like – like watching television or eating chocolate or ice cream.

While “giving something up” can be a meaningful way to deepen your personal observation of Lent, this year I would encourage you to take something on instead. Or, another way of looking at it is giving up not something tangible like chocolate but rather something intangible but much more valuable – your time. Give up your time to take something on and invest in your relationship with God in the process. Here are some ideas:

- Plan now to come to the Ash Wednesday service and to all the weekly Wednesday prayer services planned during Lent.
- Commit to coming to worship every Sunday during Lent – and bring someone new with you to experience our church at least one of those Sundays.
- Pick up a copy of the At Home Lenten Devotional and use it – every day.
- Come to one of the special Lenten programs being offered at the church this year: the Book Discussion Group, or one of the “Take It Up” workshops.
- Participate in the all church “Hallelujah Chorus!” sing-along which will close out our worship on Easter Sunday.

Details on our Lenten programs appear elsewhere in the newsletter.

Our relationship with God is not an automatic thing, much as we like to think it is. In reality it takes time and work and effort. Like anything else, you get out of your relationship with God what you put into it. So this Lent, why not try upping your investment in God – and yourself. You might be surprised what happens.

Blessings,

Pastor Ruth

LENT 2013 at United Congregational

Dates to put on your calendar

- Ash Wednesday Service at 7pm on Wednesday, February 13
- Weekly Wednesday Prayer Services from 6-6:30pm on 2/20, 2/27, 3/6, 3/13, 3/20
- Weekly Sunday Morning Worship on 2/17, 2/24, 3/3, 3/10, 3/17 at 9:30am
- Book Discussion Group after church on 2/17, 3/3, 3/10, 3/17
- "Take It Up" Workshops from 7-8:30pm on three Wednesdays 2/27, 3/13, 3/20
- Palm Sunday Service on Sunday, March 24 at 9:30am
- Holy Thursday Service of Tenebrae on Thursday, March 28 @ 7pm
- Good Friday Stations of the Cross at Wilcox Park in Westerly at 10am
- Easter Sunrise Service at 6am at Stonington Point
- Festival Service of Worship on Easter Sunday at 9:30am

Other things to consider taking on:

- Lenten At Home Devotional – handout available on Ash Wednesday
- "Hallelujah Chorus" sing-along – two rehearsal times to be announced
- Volunteer for the Worship Planning Committee to work with Pastor Ruth and Darla to plan services for Palm Sunday, Holy Week and Easter.
- Listen for announcements on Sundays about special additional things which could pop up!

Congratulations to Lynn Murray, UCCW's Lay Woman of the Year! Lynn received this honor from the congregation as she concluded moderating her last Annual Meeting on Sunday, January 27. Lynn will be officially recognized for this UCC honor at the annual Lay Woman of the Year Breakfast at Central Congregational Church in Providence on Saturday, March 2. Tickets are \$15 each. Pastor Ruth is going and would love to have a large contingent of UCCW women to support Lynn. Please be in touch with Pastor Ruth if you would like to come.

Read Any Good Books Lately?

Then please come to the first meeting of Pastor Ruth's Lenten Book Discussion Group on Sunday, February 2/17 with your favorite book in hand. We're going to spend our time at this first gathering considering everyone's suggestions and then deciding together how to proceed. We could pick one book we will all read and discuss for the remaining three weeks of the group or we could pick three books and discuss one each week. It's up to you!!! Let's get reading ... and talking!

What do YOU think about Sunday worship?

Pastor Ruth, the Deacons and Darla would love to know. With the Deacons' agreement, Pastor Ruth is setting up a worship planning committee specifically to plan the special services of Holy Week from Palm Sunday through Easter. This is your opportunity to learn firsthand how worship experiences are crafted and to offer your valuable insights and input. If you are interested in participating, please speak with Pastor Ruth. This will be a small group so if you want to be a part of it, get your name in early!

FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

Happy Birthday to:

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



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



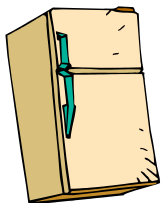
Please pray for the following members and friends of our church:

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|---------------------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Elizabeth Ball | Ann Brown | Jimmy |
| Charlie Wright | Barbara | Barbara Simmons |
| Madelyn Stratton | Sandi Davis | Fred |
| Catherine | Jeff | Jim |
| Millie Silver | Debbie | Shirley Harrington |
| Beverly and Family | Carole Lennon | Lisa |
| Vince Amkhamavong, U.S. Marines | John Dillon | David Jones |
| Susan & Devin | Sheryl | Joe & Joyce |
| Doris | Charlie | Beverly Ravenelle |
| Jennifer Clancon | Marg Madill | |
| Brian Madill | | |

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

Call for favorite Bible Verses

Pastor Ruth is looking to hear about your favorite Bible verses as she is creating this year's Lenten Home Devotional piece. Please email, call or drop her a note with your favorite bible verse noted and why it is your favorite. Then watch for the Devotional and see the verses that matter to others in our UCCW family.



Do you need an extra refrigerator?

Two used **refrigerators** are available for you to take out of our kitchen! If anyone is interested in a 2nd refrigerator that would be good for a basement, for example, please call Linda Evans and let her know. Thanks.



Soup Supper & Swing Music Saturday, February 2nd

Open to the public.

Mark your calendar and reserve **February 2nd** for another great evening. Once again, Jay Macko has some talented friends who are in a band called **Thames River Big Band** and they will be entertaining us with **swing music** for your listening and dancing pleasure!

Enjoy an endless bowl of homemade soups, delicious desserts, & wonderful live music. Start filling your bowl at

6:00 pm and be ready for music following dinner (around 6:30 pm).

Cost: \$10.00 – for an endless bowl of soup

*price includes our delicious homemade desserts and beverage

Please sign up on the sign-up sheet on the bulletin board to make soup and/or dessert.

RI Conference UCC now receiving nominations of individuals to serve on the **Process Design Group** which will be responsible for developing the process for gathering the thoughts of individuals and churches from throughout the Conference on what the future of our Conference could be. Interested individuals can either contact the Conference office directly (call 401-724-7700 or email ricucc@ricucc.org) for a Nomination form or speak with Susan in our office. Nominations must be received by the Conference no later than February 15.

Mission Memos

We hope to encourage and increase our monthly donations to the **Pawcatuck Neighborhood Center** by providing you monthly with a specific foodstuff that is especially needed by the community. For the month of January, if you are shopping and can purchase an extra or two and/or see a great sale, please consider adding to your grocery cart: **baked beans, tuna in oil, Spam, Chef Boy-R-Dee, instant mashed potatoes, and canned fruit: mixed fruit, peaches, pears and pineapple.** Of course, any and all donations are so needed. There are red buckets in Fellowship Hall and in the upper parking lot sanctuary foyer. Every second Sunday, the Mission Committee will place an in-worship collection basket on the chancel (near the altar), to help remind us to make food donations part of our monthly or weekly offering.

REMINDER: The **WARM CENTER meal** for Sunday, February 10th, is going to be the responsibility of the *Men's Club*.

Annual Chili Cook-Off

Saturday, February 23
Dinner at 5:30 p.m.



Open to the public! No admission charged, but please bring in non-perishable food items

for the Pawcatuck Neighborhood Center and bring your best pot of chili and come hungry! Prizes will be awarded for the 3 entries with the most votes. If you are not a chili maker, bring your favorite casserole. Donations of corn bread are welcome, as well as toppings to accompany ice cream!

Beverages and Dessert will be provided.

Annual Ladies' Night Dinner

sponsored by the Men's Club

Wednesday, February 20th

5:30 p.m.

at **StoneRidge** – Jerry Brown Rd in Mystic, CT

Price: \$17.00 per person includes your choice of entrée, appetizers, salad, dessert, coffee or tea, and tax and tip.

Beer, wine, and soft drinks are provided.

Entrées are: *Chicken Parmesan, Beef Tenderloin, or*

Stuffed Sole. Two of the entrées are served with potato

and a vegetable; the chicken parmesan is served with pasta.

In case of inclement weather, the date will be February 21st.

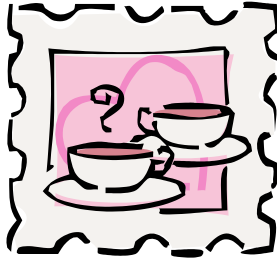
Please **sign up** on the sign-up sheet located on the bulletin board in the foyer to let us know you are coming and what your choice of meal is. Please make payment to Ed Stratton.



SAVE the date for the Attic Treasures Sale –

Saturday, March 9 from 8:00 am – 1:00 pm. It would be best if items were brought in beginning on Sunday, March 3rd. Please no big items, such as couches, and no computers. Clean Saleable items are appreciated. If someone is moving and needs to bring in items sooner, there is 1 room on the middle level available (2nd door on right). *Lynn Murray, Carole Cravinho, and Claire Calabretta* will be coordinating this event this year.

OLD FASHIONED VALENTINE TEA



Sunday, February 10th
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!

You can call the office (860) 599-1226 or Linda Evans (860) 599-5066 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 located on a round table in Fellowship Hall. Volunteers will be needed to make pastries, donate chicken, tuna, or ham, be waitresses or waiters, work in the kitchen, help set-up for tea, and clean up on Sunday.