



THE BEACON

FEBRUARY 2026

"Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not take care of you?' The he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not to do it one of the least of these, you did not do it me.'" Matthew 25:44-45

The following is an excerpt from the message I offered through our virtual service this past Sunday morning, after the terrible events taking place in Minnesota last Saturday.

My heart is breaking this morning as the news of another innocent person being killed in Minneapolis by ICE dominates the news and rocks our world. How did we come to this, we wonder. Dear ones, it has taken decades, even centuries for us to be here at this moment but we never saw it coming. We have all been so deeply nestled into our snug and safe bubbles that we truly never saw it coming, never thought it could happen here in the United States of America. Much deep reflection is needed to discern why this is the case, but there is no doubt that here we are. The question for all of us now has to be – what's next? Where do we go from here?

Let me stop right here and acknowledge that some of you may already be put off by these reflections as being “too political.” You want to believe that “politics,” however one might define that, has no place in church. You think church should be a neutral place where we can come and retreat from all this horrible news and just be reassured that somehow, some way, God is in charge and, ultimately, everything will be okay. I get that. I really do. It’s a fine guideline for preachers to follow, under normal circumstances, and I try to do that. But these are NOT normal times, dear ones. The rules have changed, not by us certainly.

Dear ones, these are not usual times in our beloved country. You know that. I know that. These ICE operations coordinated out of an administration in Washington, DC that is internationally named as deeply corrupt, have one intention – to terrify everyone into submission to a white Christian nationalist takeover of our country. People are being murdered in the streets of Minneapolis for looking out for the welfare of their neighbors, along with their own welfare as untrained and seemingly unrestrained ICE officers

and Border Patrol officers (please note there is NO border anywhere near Minneapolis/St. Paul) run roughshod in their streets. They hide behind the face of law enforcement but they don’t care about the law. What they want is freedom to execute a form of vigilante justice where what’s legal and what isn’t is totally up to them. Dear ones, enough. Enough.

Perhaps you’ve already heard about all the clergy who headed to Minnesota to join the protests there. I had a lot of friends there, on the streets, at the protests at Target headquarters and at the airport. In fact I saw on the television news a friend and colleague I have known for 30 years get arrested for praying at the airport where they gathered to pray that the airlines would stop supporting ICE’s illegal deportations of people legally in the United States. He was on his knees praying and he was arrested. He didn’t resist. He got up, was handcuffed and placed in a van for transport. All the clergy were later released, but without apology. I need you to understand that I wanted to be there with my colleagues but for many reasons, I couldn’t be. So, I am doing what so many clergy who could not go to Minneapolis have been asked to do instead, right here in our own churches. Stand up and preach to this situation so here I am, even though I risk being accused of being too “political” for doing so.

What you need to understand, dear ones, is that I have no choice to remain silent. And to preach about something that might help you “feel better” or “ease your fears and your nerves” is not what I am called to do. Not in this moment. Not when the ethnic cleansing now so blatantly visible in Minnesota and moving along with ICE into new areas like Portland, Maine; Philadelphia, PA and New York City are already in the works. History teaches us how wrong this is – for churches to pretend like everything is okay when it is clearly not. We can never forget that some churches were openly supportive of the Nazi Party and Fascism, persuaded by statements in the Nazi Party Platform of 1933 about what they called “positive Christianity.” These were Christian churches that were willing to look the other way as Nazism took over the country. Dietrich Bonhoeffer dared to declare openly that this was a perversion of Jesus’ teachings and, in the end, he was deemed so dangerous to the Reich through his words that he was still assassinated in a German prison camp as the Allies were about to liberate it. A lot of Bonhoeffer’s writings along with Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King’s writings are finding their way into a lot of public spaces now, as they should. If you don’t know much about either or both of them, google them. Both of them gave their lives as pastors and

ministers in order to hold those accountable who believe, preach and teach that God does play favorites. God does prefer white people, as some people believe. God does prefer simple theology that requires only that one profess Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior and that, if they do this, everything else will be alright. They don't need to worry about anything "political" because Jesus will magically make everything okay for everyone. Dear Ones, Jesus never said anything like that. In fact, Jesus said the opposite.

This is very clear in the text which we read last Sunday, an excerpt of which appears at the beginning of this article. It says in part:

"Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, ³⁵for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' ³⁷Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' ⁴⁰And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.'"

So, dear ones, let's note that Jesus' descriptions of those who are welcomed into the "kingdom" are not the ones who turn a blind eye or look the other way or who like church services to be politics free. Jesus says just the opposite:

Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You who are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels, ⁴²for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' ⁴⁴Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not take care of you?' ⁴⁵Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.'"

So why am I preaching about this today, of all days. Why couldn't I just "let it go with a few prayers and a Scripture reading or two. The answer is simple. I am preaching this today because I

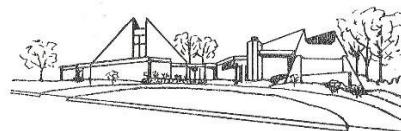
literally have no choice but to do so. It is required by my ordination vows which I took in our sanctuary almost 14 years ago:

I was asked by the ordaining authority:

Will you exercise wisdom and courage in carrying out public duties, witnessing and working for God's justice and mercy in each situation?

And I answered, as expected and required by the United Church of Christ: *I will, relying on God's grace.*

When I made that vow all those years ago, did I ever imagine the courage I would be called upon to live up to and in to in these days? NO! Dear ones, please be assured nothing would make me happier, more at peace, more joyful than being able to go back to the days when all I was asked to do, expected to do, was to preach and teach the Gospel, perform the rites and sacraments of the church and to visit the sick and lonely. No one is more upset than I am that is no longer the world any of us live in. We might wish we did. But we don't. And it's part of my sacred responsibility as your pastor to make sure we are prepared to face these times we find ourselves living through. This is difficult, painful and challenging, for you and for me. So, I thank you for your patience. Thank you for your support. If you are unhappy with what I am saying here, please tell me directly. Let's have a conversation about it. I need to hear your thoughts. Text me, email me, call me on my cell. Making our way through these times together will only happen if we trust each other, love each other enough to keep talking, to admit our own limitations and biases, including me. Amen.



CALL FOR THE 62nd ANNUAL MEETING UNITED CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF WESTERLY, UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

**NOTE: THIS MEETING HAD TO BE POSTPONED TO
FEBRUARY 1, 2026 due to the snowstorm.**

The Annual Meeting shall be held on February 1, 2026 immediately following worship in the sanctuary. All are welcome to attend; only members of the church are able to vote.

The purpose of the meeting shall be to receive the yearly reports of Officers, Boards, Committees, Organizations and Departments; to elect officers; adopt the annual budget; set up plans for the new

year; and vote on any other business that may come before the congregation.

The Treasurer's Report, duly audited, shall be presented.

Respectfully submitted,
Cathy Gray, Clerk



FEBRUARY WORSHIP SCHEDULE

Feb. 1 - "Trusting in Possibilities" Ezekiel 37:1-14

Feb. 8 - "Running Away from God" Jonah 1:1-17

Feb. 15 - "Walking Humbly with God" Micah 6:6-8

Feb. 18 - Ash Wednesday Service at 6PM

Feb. 22 - Worship Service 9:45AM

Sermon topics and scripture texts for each week appear in the weekly email. Also, please speak with Rev. Ruth if you would like a hard copy of any sermon.



FEBRUARY DIACONATE SCHEDULE

Feb. 1 - Joann Spurley 401-714-8948

Feb. 8 - Christina Brummund 860-599-1719

Feb. 15 - Bethany Foster 401-539-4003

Feb. 22 - TBA

NEWS FROM THE DEACONS

The Deacons appreciate any feedback on services, as well as suggestions for going forward. We understand snow days have interrupted some in person services, with decisions to go virtual sometimes being made on Sunday morning due to weather changes. If you don't have access to email or social media, we would appreciate it if you would speak to any Deacon so we can create a list of calls to make to be sure everyone has received the message. New members will be received in February. We look forward to

welcoming new members this spring. The Homeless Awareness Vigil will take place on February 7th from 6-7pm. Other upcoming events include our Community Soup Supper (March 13th), Attic Treasures, (April 25th), and Coffee House (May 30th), where folks are welcome to perform. We are grateful for anyone willing to join us on the Board.

Lynn Murray

TRUSTEES NOTES

Pledges for December were \$5,038, \$944 less than the anticipated pledge amount of \$5,982. Total income for December was \$22,352. Total expenses for December were \$15,431.



If you are interested in the financial affairs of the church, please consider joining the Board of Trustees. Speak to Pastor Ruth or any trustee!

As always, if you should see something in the building that needs attention, please speak or get in touch with any trustee.

FROM THE FINANCIAL SECRETARY

We sadly mark the passing of our Assistant Financial Secretary, William Street III. For

A cartoon illustration of a hand holding a coin and dropping it into a purple collection plate. The plate is filled with various bills and coins. The hand is wearing a white shirt.

many years, he "counted the pennies and dollars" here at UCC Westerly, both in this role and as a Trustee. He faithfully

volunteered his time and expertise. He will be missed.

Michele Mitchell is our Assistant Financial Secretary for 2026. I'd like to thank the two additional folks who are available in an emergency, should we require a second counter for a given Sunday or an event. I will schedule a time to briefly meet with them to go over our procedures. Much appreciation to Melissa Stratton and Peter Hainsworth!

My personal tax accountant shared some future good news for everyone who donates to our church. Starting with the 2026 tax return (next year), you will once again be able to deduct charitable donations up to \$2,000,

even if you do not itemize! This benefit was around a few years ago, but disappeared. I'm glad it will return! Please verify this news with your own accountant. I thought it was important to share, as whatever you donate to UCC Westerly now can be a tax deduction next year. It's a nice incentive to be extra generous!

If you ever have questions or comments regarding your pledge, donations, or financial statements, feel free to contact me.

Jenny Brummund,
Financial Secretary



MISSION MOMENT

The Missions Team would like to thank everyone for their tremendous support of our Food Donation Drive for the PNC during the month of January. We will get the many donations over to them as soon as weather permits!

For the month of February, we will focus on our Homeless Awareness Vigil planned for Saturday, February 7 from 6-7pm. We will gather in our upper parking lot around a bonfire to stand in witness to and in solidarity with all those who are homeless and/or invisible in our community. Please see the flier sent out as a separate attachment with this *Beacon*. *Our donation drive that event and the month of February is for new and gently used blankets which will be donated to one of our sister churches in Hartford which operates a temporary overnight shelter from December until April.*

We also have met and developed a Missions Calendar for the balance of this year and it will be posted at church soon.

Sandi Davis, Kathy Sugar, Melissa Stratton, Eileen Rawnsley, Peter Hainsworth



Our own Sandi Davis now sits on the board of Operation Fresh Start and will keep us clued and involved on all the projects they have planned for the year ahead. In the meantime, we are so very glad to provide the home base for this vital community resource!!

COFFEE HOUSE RETURNS!

Save the Date: May 30, Saturday, at 6:30 pm

To be held in Fellowship Hall... Donations collected will benefit the Organ Fund.

Watch for details to register to perform. We

welcome musical acts, poetry reading, clean comedy, juggling...anything that can be performed in a small area. Spread the word to your talented friends! Sound system will be

provided. We'll be asking for volunteers to provide desserts and to assist with set up and clean-up. Event organizers are: Allana Allik, Erin Blake, Doug and Jenny Brummund.

We are excited to gather again for a fun church and community evening!

ATTIC TREASURES 2026

Don't forget our Attic Treasures yard sale as

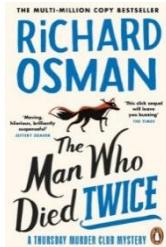


you are cleaning and organizing after the holidays! Toys, clean gently-worn clothes, household goods & tools, gently-used

linens & towels.... just about anything would make a good donation to the yard sale. Items can be stored in the middle level Room #3 at church until the sale which will be later in the Spring. **(No furniture, electronics, or broken items, please!)**



UCCW BOOKS is an on-going discussion group ministry of UCC Westerly. We are a group of folks who love to read, talk about what we read, or just talk. Everyone is welcome! Bring a bag lunch and dessert is provided!



OUR NEXT GATHERING...

Wednesday, February 25th at 12PM noon In the church Parlor.

WHAT WE'RE READING...

‘The Man Who Died Twice’ by Richard Osman

Books are available to borrow through your local library or for purchase through your favorite local bookstore.

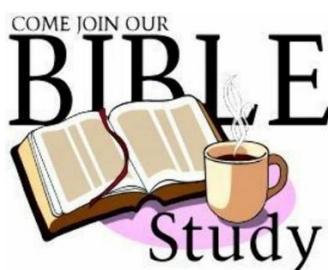


LADIES WHO LUNCH

This is a fellowship group for the ladies of our church with no agenda other than fun! We meet approximately once a month for lunch, conversation, and general frivolity. Our next scheduled gathering is:

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 18 @ 12 NOON
Stonington Pizza, Route 1 in Stonington

Please add your name to the sign-up sheet on the bulletin board at church so we know how many to expect. Thanks! Any questions on this group should be directed to Rev. Ruth.



WEDNESDAYS

February 4th, 11th, 18th, 25th
at 10:30am in the Parlor

We're back!! Wednesday mornings at 10:30am in the church parlor. This is NOT your typical Bible Study! Led by Rev. Ruth, a Harvard

trained biblical scholar, this study is more about learning how to read and understand the Bible for yourself. Our starting point is first and always your questions! We have a curriculum we use as a guideline, but it is not a firm structure. In February our focus will be on the New Testament!

No need to sign up or register! Just show up and join the fun! Please speak with Rev. Ruth for any questions.



Have you wondered about what it would be like to join our church?

Several folks have, so Rev. Ruth is offering this special gathering for folks considering becoming New Members.

**SUNDAY, MARCH 1 @ 11:15am
(after worship)**

Come and learn about the “behind the scenes” details of what it means to be a member here. Please speak with Rev. Ruth to be on the list for this gathering and with any questions you may have beforehand.

BRIGHTEN SOMEONE'S DAY



These are our folks currently unable to make it to church. Please reach out and say hello with a card or note!

Alice Brown

27 Governor Avenue, Westerly, RI 02891

Bill & Carol Budnik

332 Burdickville Rd., Charlestown, RI 02813

Christa & Bill Colprit

3 Elizabeth Drive, Pawcatuck, CT 06379

PRAYER TREE



Our church has a very active and vital prayer ministry which includes, among other things, our Prayer Tree. If you would like to be a member of our prayer team or if you would like the team to pray for you, please speak with any Deacon.

OFFICE HOURS

Tuesday
9:00AM - 12:00PM
Wednesday & Thursday
9:00AM - 1:00PM

Please be aware that the format and spacing for the Beacon may appear differently on your computer or device. Thank you for your understanding!

CELEBRATE!

FEBRUARY SPECIAL DAYS

Birthdays

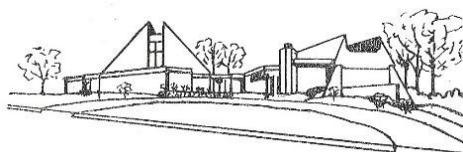
- Gary Davis
- Jessica Sylvestre

Anniversaries

- None

Please add in your special days by calling the church office at (860) 599-1226.

We are no longer providing specific birthday dates as an added measure of confidentiality for our folks.



OUR STAFF

Pastor: The Rev. Ruth Shilling Hainsworth
Organist & Choirs Director: David Cranmer
Church Operations Coordinator: Jerin Peloquin

CONTACT US

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