



"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16

This oft quoted verse is understood by many as the cornerstone of what it means to be a Christian. In that sense, it is a key component of what is called the *kerygma*, the proclamation of the Good News that Jesus is God's Son, the Christ or the Savior, sent as a gift to us by God. I'm sure at least the Scripture citation, John 3:16, is familiar. You've seen it on posters at major sporting events in the United States over the last decades. The funny thing is that what this verse actually means is not as clear nor as absolute in its meaning as many evangelical Christians, especially the fundamentalists and Bible literalists, would have you believe. In fact, I would argue that it is this verse, and the understanding of what it means, that forms the line between progressive and conservative Christianity. It's also, in a very real way, the focal point of the many Lenten experiences we are offering through the church this year.

One interpretation of this verse, the one which is behind all those posters held up by devout folks in athletic stadiums, is that all you have to do is repeat this phrase – like a magical incantation almost – and then you are saved. Now, most of them will concede that it is actually more than just saying it. You have to "believe" what you are saying is true. You have to believe that Jesus is your Lord and Savior and that his entire purpose in coming to earth from God is to save all the individual fellow believers from eternal damnation for eternal glory in heaven. Theoretically, you also need to be "convicted" in that faith, meaning that this belief in Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior is so personally transforming that you will be a new person and live a life completely transformed by that knowledge. Understood another way, you may still sin but you will do your best not to and ask for forgiveness when you do. Because you don't want to miss out on that eternal reward which is life after death – heaven – eternal bliss and happiness.

In this interpretation of this text, salvation is a completely personal matter. Your goal is to save yourself from eternal damnation in hell which is what is waiting for those who do not proclaim Jesus as Lord and Savior. Once you have committed yourself to this personal acceptance of Jesus as

Savior, you then will require a very clear definition of what is sin, and what isn't. This is where things go off the rails since conservative evangelicals see sin everywhere and they gladly take on the role of deciding what is sin and what isn't.

Understandable, I guess. Only problem is that they want to decide that for everyone, evangelical or not, Christian or not (you should be Christian they think). This is because they have decided that all these things they deem sinful, many of which others do not see that way, still have to be seen as sinful by everyone so that they themselves are not tempted to sin. Sigh... This is one way we end up with the false form of Christianity known as Christian Nationalism. I'm not going to write about it here, but if you're curious, I think you will find the Lenten Book & Bible Study I am leading (see details elsewhere) very interesting.

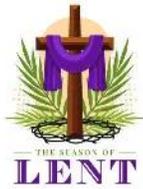
So, what is the other interpretation of this verse, the one we as progressives try to live into as faithful Christians? If you read the verse, it all comes down to love – the love of God made manifest in Christ. We believe that God's love made real in Jesus is not restricted by anyone else's narrow definition of sin. We leave the determination of sin – judgement in other words – totally in God's hands. What is transformed by our acceptance of God's gift of love made manifest in Jesus is each of us is challenged every day, in word and deed, to live as Christ taught us to during his earthly life. We are to love God with all that we are and all that we have AND we are to love the other (anyone different from ourselves) as we love ourselves. We also do not believe that the Kingdom of God is only in heaven to be enjoyed by the "saved" at the end of our earthly lives. We believe the Kingdom of God is right here and right now and that it is up to us – each one of us who claim the name Christian – to work to make that Kingdom of God visible, real and accessible to everyone. That means fighting for social justice issues such as racism, sexism, ageism, able-ism, the rights of the LGTQ+ community and so on. Further, we acknowledge that God is much bigger than any box we attempt to put God in. We acknowledge that we cannot constrain God by our attempts to define God and God's expectations of us. We can only discern God's plan for us one day at a time, sometimes one hour at a time, as we do our best to live Jesus' teachings into reality. Finally, we understand the church as the place where we come together as a community of God's Beloved people to learn and support and practice our faith together. Sort of hard to fit all that on a poster, huh?

All of this is the background for what we have created in the way of Lenten experiences for you this year. I hope you'll check them out and

participate as you are able. I'm looking forward to seeing you as these weeks of Lent unfold.

Your sister in faith,

Pastor Ruth



LENTEN PROGRAMS!

- Daily Devotional and Lenten Practices Guide – Copies available at church
- Lenten Book & Bible Study – SEPARATION OF CHURCH & HATE by John Fugelsang – Beginning on Wednesday (March 18 – thanks to the blizzard 😊)
- Now's a great time to join the choir or volunteer for a Board or project team!
- Holy Week events:
 - PALM SUNDAY SYMBOLS SERVICE
 - Sunday, March 29
 - MAUNDY THURSDAY SERVICE
 - Thursday, April 2 @ 6pm
 - GOOD FRIDAY VIGIL,
 - 12 noon to 3pm @ the Labyrinth
 - EASTER SUNRISE SERVICE
 - 6am @ Stonington Point
 - FESTIVAL EASTER SERVICE
 - UCC Westerly at 9:45am

Join us and bring your friends and family!

HELP NEEDED **for Digital Ministry Team!**

Rev. Ruth is in desperate need of assistance with our digital broadcast ministry on Sunday mornings. To this end she is setting up a “Digital Ministry Team”. This group of 4-5 folks will work with her to brainstorm possibilities for updating and upgrading our broadcast capabilities and then assist with the implementation of same. Willing to give it a try? Please speak with Rev. Ruth anytime!



MARCH WORSHIP SCHEDULE

Mar-1: Worship @ 9:45AM w/Communion

Mar-8: Worship @ 9:45AM

Rev. Ede Preaching!!!

Mar-15: Worship @ 9:45AM

Mar-22: Worship @ 9:45AM

Mar-29: Palm Sunday Worship @ 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.



MARCH DIACONATE SCHEDULE

Mar-1: Allana (860) 599-5212

Mar-8: Bethany (401) 539-4003

Mar-15: Christina (860) 599-1719

Mar-22: Lynn (401) 539-7578

Mar-29: JoAnn (401) 714-8948



REMEMBER!!
SUNDAY, MARCH 8
DAYLIGHT SAVINGS
TIME BEGINS!

NEWS FROM THE DEACONS

The Deacons are pleased that there are potential new members joining our church soon. More information to come as to when that will happen. The Homeless Awareness vigil took place following the Ash Wednesday service after being postponed due to this winter's weather. It was very meaningful to be out in the upper lot on a cold, rainy night. Thank you to Fred Tarasuk for bringing and monitoring the fire pit. We are also pleased to have Jenny Brummund joining us on the Board, when she can, due to her sound & choir responsibilities. Others are always

welcome to join us. Our monthly meetings continue to be via Zoom, which makes them focused & efficient. The Easter sunrise service will take place at Stonington Point once again this year. Our upcoming events include our Soup Supper & the Attic Treasures/Yard Sale, which will be held indoors. Donations welcome.

Lynn Murray

TRUSTEES NOTES



Pledges for January were \$7872, \$1890 more than the anticipated pledge amount of \$5,982. Total income for January was \$14,872. Total expenses for January were \$11,063.

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



Thank you for all your faithful donations!

Our Mission Committee will be receiving the UCC One Great Hour of Sharing

offering during the month of March. This is a mission collection that reaches "partners worldwide and ministries that fund health, education, and agricultural development, as well as emergency relief, refugee ministries, and international disaster responses." UCC calls this "Our love offering to the world." It is one of five UCC offerings each year.

Due to Old Man Winter, you may experience a longer delay before your checks are deposited. Thank you for your understanding. Just contact Jenny if you have any questions!

Jenny Brummund,
Financial Secretary



MISSION MOMENT

The Missions Team would once again like to thank everyone for their tremendous support of our blanket donation drive for the Emergency Homeless Shelter at Center Church in Hartford during the month of February. Our donations were delivered to them this week!

For the month of March, we will be highlighting that we are a Five for Five contributing congregation of the United Church of Christ, meaning we support all five of the denominational offerings each year. This month we are highlighting in particular the ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING offering which supports disaster relief work, as well as refugee and development ministries.

Also, kindly note that we receive food donations for the PNC year-round. Those donations may be placed in the large bucket in the back corner of the sanctuary.

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



MARCH WELCOME BASKET DRIVE AND VOLUNTEER FAIR

January and February may have looked quiet at OFS, but behind the scenes they were anything but. Our team spent many hours organizing and reorganizing our space, restocking supplies, receiving generous donations from individuals and partner agencies, and supporting a steady stream of neighbors in need. We were also grateful for the kindness of local businesses, including a Dine-to-Donate at Mel's Creamery and an After-Hours Book Release with Elissa Bass at the Stonington Free Library. We extend heartfelt thanks to everyone who contributed to these efforts.

Two events are coming up in March: a welcome basket toiletry drive and a volunteer drive. The list of items needed for the toiletry drive is provided below, and donated items may be placed in the OFS basket in the bell courtyard narthex. Details for the volunteer drive are also listed below. We hope you'll join us and continue to support this work. Thank you for all you do to help our neighbors and strengthen our community.

ITEMS NEEDED:

Cleaning Supplies

All-purpose cleaner
 Kitchen cleanser
 Dish soap
 Sponges
 Glass cleaner
 Toilet bowl cleaner
 Disinfectant wipes

Bathroom Essentials

Hand soap
 Toilet brush

Kitchen Essentials

Dish towels
 Pot holders
 Foil / plastic wrap
 Trash & Paper Goods
 Tall kitchen trash can
 Trash can liners
 Paper towels
 Toilet paper

Home Care Items

Mop and bucket
 Broom
 Fire blanket

VOLUNTEER WITH OFS!

Join Operation Fresh Start and help make a real difference! We're looking for committee volunteers to assist with events and drives. Meet our board, get involved, and help pay kindness forward, as we give families and children in our community a fresh start, no matter where they are in life's journey.

[Learn more at our volunteer drive!](#)

Dates: March 7th 2pm-4:30pm

Location: Coastal Lodge 67/CT Free Masons
 637 Pequot Trail, Stonington CT 06378

Get In Touch:

Shannon: (860) 460-8502
 operationfreshstart.2021@gmail.com

CONGREGATIONAL LIFE HAS A BUSY SPRING PLANNED!!!

COMMUNITY SOUP SUPPER POTLUCK

Friday, March 13 • 5:30-7:30 PM



Join us for an evening of good food, warm fellowship, and shared community spirit. Everyone is invited to gather for a cozy Soup

Supper Potluck as we enjoy homemade soups and one another's company.

An offering basket will be available for donations. All gifts will support our Organ Fund, helping sustain the music ministry that enriches our worship.

How to Participate:

Bring a pot of your favorite soup to share—family recipes and creative flavors welcome. Beverages, bread, and a selection of desserts will be provided.

Come for the soup, stay for the fellowship. All are welcome at the table!

ATTIC TREASURES 2026

Call for Donations & Volunteers



Our Attic Treasures Indoor Yard Sale will be held on Saturday, April 25, from 8:00 AM to 12:00 noon. This fun community event helps raise

money for organ maintenance, and we're counting on your help to make it a success.

Volunteers Needed

We're looking for helping hands to:

- Set up before the sale
- Assist during sale hours
- Pack up leftover items afterward

The Jonnycake Center will pick up any remaining items that afternoon.

What to Donate

As you clean and organize after the holidays, please keep the sale in mind. Popular items include:

- Toys and games
- Clean, gently-worn clothing

- Tools and household goods
- Kitchen items and glassware
- Holiday décor
- Books and puzzles
- Linens and towels

All donations should be clean, in good condition, and complete (no missing pieces).

Items We Cannot Accept

- Furniture
- Electronics
- Mattresses
- Broken or damaged items

Where to Drop Off Donations

Items may be left on the middle level of the church, in or near Room #3, any time before the sale.

COFFEE HOUSE RETURNS!

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



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

Please contact Jenny Brummund as soon as possible if you are

interested in performing. There will be time for approximately six acts. 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. Please consider baking a dessert to share. and to assist with set up and clean-up. Event organizers are: Allana Allik, Erin Blake, Doug and Jenny Brummund.

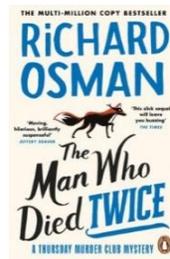
We are excited to gather again for a fun church and community evening!



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, March 18 at 12:30PM noon in the church Parlor. **Kindly note time change!!!**



WHAT WE'RE READING...

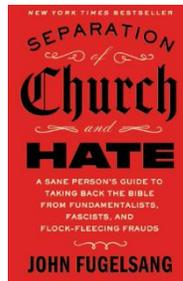
'The Man Who Died Twice' by Richard Osman

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

LENTEN BOOK & BIBLE STUDY

WEDNESDAYS

In Person @ 11am in the Parlor
March 18, 25 & April 1, 8, 15



This study will use the book Separation of Church and Hate (pictured here) by John Fugelsang. Fugelsang is actually a comedian by profession, but he is also a person with a unique perspective on the Christian faith. He is the son of

a former nun and a former priest who left Holy Orders to marry and bring up their son as a practicing Catholic with an open and inquiring mind. Fugelsang's writing is very accessible, funny at times, even though he tackles head-on current "hot button" social issues through the biblical reference points leveraged by the Christian Right.

As we undertake this particular 5-week study, we will focus on these topics specifically:

Jesus and Paul ~ Scriptural literalism ~ LGBTQ+ concerns ~ "Illegal" Immigrants ~ Gun Control

*Additional notes on this study

This book was published in 2025 so it should be available in the library. It is also available as an Audio Book and used copies at very reasonable prices are available through various online sources...BUT please support our local bookstore if you can!

Kindly note that due to the blizzard, this Book & Bible Study will continue beyond Easter!

Considering Church Membership?

Sunday, March 1

After Worship in the Church Parlor



If you've been wondering what it means to become a member of our church, we invite you to join us for a relaxed and informative

gathering in the parlor after worship.

Participants will receive a packet of basic information about our church—who we are, what we believe, and how we live out our faith together. This is also a wonderful opportunity to ask any questions you may have about membership, our ministries, or the life of our congregation.

All are warmly welcome as you explore whether this next step feels right for you.

Note: Since some folks will most likely not be able to make this gathering due to blizzard aftermath, another one will most likely be scheduled soon. Watch for it! You can also call Rev. Ruth for more information on becoming a member of our amazing, vital church!

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!

Marc & Courtney Ainsworth & Family
9 Cleveland Street, Pawcatuck, CT 06379

Carole & Joe Cravinho
2304 Messina Drive, Pearland, TX 77581

Brenda Cunningham
2850 SW Ortega Street, Port St. Lucie, FL 34953

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.

MARCH SPECIAL DAYS

Birthdays

- Cathy Gray
- Joseph Lanphere
- Shirin Platt
- Emma Stratton
- Dwayne Spurley-Dows
- Edward Stratton
- Nathan Sylvestre
- Claire Calabretta

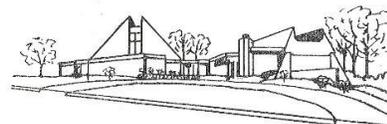


Anniversaries

- 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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Telephone: (860) 599-1226
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Website: www.uccwesterly.org

Facebook/UCCWesterly



uccwesterly.org



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!