

2017



The Epistle

The Official Newsletter of United Methodist Church of Hartford

Be Rooted in God's Love

Grow in Grace

*Bear Fruit of
Justice and Peace*

FEBRUARY



From the Pastor

When we look at biblical history, there is no one person that has triggered such an array of human feelings and ideologies as Jesus Himself.

People love to encounter and embrace Jesus as Healer, Savior, and Friend. But we often forget that Jesus was also very political, controversial, and often challenged the societal norms in hopes that the Kingdom of God would pierce our hearts. Some historians

would argue that Jesus was a trouble maker, rule breaker and divider. While others would say that Jesus was a visionary who pushed humanity toward a more perfect union, even when people resisted and did not agree with His methods.

Despite these various views, Jesus always continued to seek His Father's wisdom and guidance, as He loved humanity unconditionally. Jesus didn't always do what was comfortable. He obeyed God at all costs, even in the midst of religious, world, and political power struggles. Jesus did not shy away from controversy because He understood that all things work together for good and that God had a plan for all of us, despite opposition. He encourages us to do the same today.

In this time and political climate, it seems as if our world is in opposition to Jesus' vision for humanity; which is to love and serve one another through the comfortable and not so comfortable moments. One of the biggest moments that have recently reshaped our country was the 2016 Presidential Campaign. Most people would agree that this past election was very contentious and mean spirited. The political animosity among the two parties was obvious and the spirit of hatred was at its all-time high; leaving the church right smack in the middle.

For those of us who are followers of Christ, especially spiritual leaders, there is a need and a responsibility to address this political climate. I struggled with how to address this "sensitive" issue. I was also really considering not saying anything. However, God urged me to do otherwise as I sat and talked with a fellow minister from the United Church of Christ. I clearly recall him saying that "any preacher, who does not address the politics of this time, has done the Gospel a disservice. Jesus was POLITICAL."

It was in that moment, I was comforted and affirmed in my spirit that... yes, Jesus was political. Jesus came to shake things up. He did not come to make us feel comfortable. He came to fulfill the greatest commandment: LOVE. He came so that we may be transformed and in response learn to love and serve one another in LOVE.

Taking that mantle with love and service as the focal point, I was led to do something "controversial" in worship, something I had never done before. As people may recall, Sunday November 20th 2016, we were completing our stewardship series, "Faith in God, Christian Discipleship, and Serving One Another in Love." The primary message on that day was "Changed Hearts, Changed Hands."

As I began delivering the message, I shared with the congregation that this message was going to be a "little" controversial. Keeping the focal point of love and service in my head and heart, I asked the members of the congregation to sit on the side of the candidate they had voted for. Yes, you heard it! I did just that! I did it not only for the effect, but to teach a greater lesson on serving one another in love.

The ultimate message was... that no matter who you voted for, Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump, we as the church must set the example by serving one another in love! We all know that it is one thing to serve someone who agrees with us, looks like us, or has the same views as us. However, the biggest test is when we can love and serve our brother and sister who are on opposite sides of us. It was my hope that we as the political pundits would often say, "reach across the aisle" and share the love of Christ with one another. For at the end of the day, regardless of who we voted for, regardless if we are conservative or liberal, man or woman, young or old, gay or straight, Jew, Christian, or Muslim, etc.; the greatest stewardship lesson is for us to love our neighbors as ourselves and to serve our neighbors in LOVE. Although, we did not physically reach across the aisle as I hoped, I felt the message was clear.

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Unfortunately, it was not clear for all people. Some privately shared with me that it was one of the most powerful and challenging messages they heard, while others were very offended. To be honest, I was taken aback. It was certainly NEVER my intention to offend anyone, but rather to invite our church to be socially conscious and proactive in our faith. Jesus was the social conscious of His day, and so was our founder John Wesley. Both men often met opposition to their messages. Their intentions were never to divide people, but to build the Kingdom of God.

Today, we, the church, are called to be that social conscious in our communities and the world. Our social consciousness may not always be evident in the way we think and act. However, God still calls us to be the church even when it is uncomfortable. As a church, we must open our hearts and minds to deal with the various “hot button” issues of our time. Just as our Jesus was POLITICAL, RADICAL, and TRANSFORMATIONAL, we are called to do the same. For it is not until our hearts are changed, will we begin to see the humanity of others regardless of their political beliefs, ethnicity, and/or religious beliefs. We as the church must always set the example by stretching our hands out to one another. Occasionally, we will need to be ready to stand out and stand up for what we believe. We must remember that even when we find ourselves in the mist of uncomfortable and challenging situations, it is also the best place for us to not only grow as the Body of Christ, but also be healed and transformed.

As we continue to mature in the Lord, it is my hope and prayer that we all will be open to the movement of the Holy Spirit in new and sometimes uncomfortable ways. I hope and pray that our church can be that community where we can have open dialogue and allow the Holy Spirit to touch our hearts in ways that no one would ever feel as if they are an outcast, a “bad” person, or cannot express his or her thoughts. I pray that our church would be a safe haven where we can debate, be challenged; but more importantly, LOVE.

*Peace,
Pastor Rhonda*

Lectionary Readings for the Month of February 2017

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

February 5 - 5th Sunday after Epiphany (Color: Green)

Isaiah 58:1-12; Psalm 112:1-10 (UM833); 1Corinthians 2:1-16; Matthew 5:13-20

Liturgist: Kevin Loveland

February 12 - 6th Sunday after Epiphany (Color: Green)

Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Psalm 119:1-8 (UM840); 1Corinthians 3:1-9; Matthew 5:21-37

Liturgist: John Swanson

February 19 - 7th Sunday after the EPIPHANY (Color: Green)

Leviticus 19:1-2, 9-18; Psalm 119:33-40 (UM840); 1Corinthians 3:10-11, 16-23

Matthew 5:38-48

Liturgist: Ashley Blount

February 26 - TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY (Color: White)

Exodus 24:12-18; Psalm 99 (UM819); 2Peter 1:16-21; Matthew 17:1-9

Liturgist: Beverley Nepaul



FEBRUARY CELEBRATIONS



BIRTHDAYS

1 - Timothy Smith (c)

2 - Jade Islam (c)

Frank Wacht

5 - Heather Muirhead

6 - Harold Craig

8 - Elle Ramos (c)

10 - Maria MacDonald

11 - Kevin Loveland

17 - Gabrielle Waligora

18 - Matthew Welsh

19 - Adam Muirhead (c)

24 - James Dinello

28 - Mary Cockram
Bruce DeHaney

*Thank
You*

We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to the congregation for the many kindnesses shown to us following our mother's death.

Beth Ann Loveland Sennett and Family

OUR NEXT COMMUNITY BREAKFAST IS ON FEBRUARY 12 - *DON'T MISS IT!*

The Breakfast Ministry would like to thank the congregation for their continued prayers and support. We pray to see you ALL at the next Community Breakfast. You are all encouraged to invite a neighbor, co-worker, family member, or friend to have a great **FREE** meal and then come to our worship service. Together let's show the community the love of God. Please share with us your favorite baked goods as a donation towards the breakfast. Please contact Ashley Blount if you are able to help in any way (860) 994-0100.



**SUNDAY, FEB. 12,
2017 • 8:30 AM**

MENU

- EGGS
- PANCAKES
- SAUSAGE (PORK, TURKEY)
- BACON (PORK, TURKEY)
- BISCUITS
- ASSORTED BAKED GOODS
- JUICE (ORANGE, APPLE, GRAPEFRUIT)
- HOT TEA, COFFEE

UMC of Hartford will be serving breakfast on the **2nd Sunday** of each month. The prayer is that people of the neighborhood will know that they are loved by God and cared for by the UMC Hartford community.

Matthew 25:35 "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you invited me in."

UMW



NEWS

The United Methodist Women's gathering will be held on Tuesday, March 7, 2017.

"Child Sexual Abuse: The Hidden Secret"

Gabrielle Waligora-Carroll will conduct the presentation. Participants will learn about the definition and common forms of sexual abuse, statistics related to the number of children impacted by this crime, victim and offender profiles, why children do not tell and how to intervene if you suspect.

Ms. Waligora-Carroll holds degrees from the University of North Carolina and the University of Connecticut. A LCSW, her clinical work specializes in providing trauma-focused care to primary victims of crime. She works with children, adolescents, as well as their non-offending caregivers.

It should be noted that the content of this talk will be graphic due to the subject matter being discussed.

SUPPER AT 6:30PM - - MEETING AT 7:15PM - - PROGRAM AT 7:45PM

Remember: It's a potluck supper. If you are unable to bring food, the cost is \$5.00. Also, please remember to bring your table setting!

If you are interested, please call the church office (860-523-5132).

All are welcome! We look forward to seeing you!

SOUPER BOWL OF CARING – SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 5

Now in its 27th year, **Souper Bowl of Caring** utilizes the football Super Bowl weekend in America to mobilize people, especially young people, to fight hunger and poverty in their local communities. The vision is to transform Super Bowl weekend into America's largest youth-led weekend of giving and serving. All funds raised remain in local communities.



Our church participates by collecting monetary donations for our Feeding Ministries and cans of soup and other non-perishables for the West End Food Pantry. Help us score numbers of “touchdowns” for hunger alleviation!! On that Sunday, February 5, let’s over-fill the altar with canned goods, and fill the soup pots with money. (Checks should be made out to UMC OH, with Feeding Ministries listed on the memo line.) *Score a touchdown for alleviating hunger!*



COOMBS SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS DEADLINE IS MARCH 3!

Upon her death, Pat Coombs, a long-time member of our church, established a scholarship fund to help high school graduates of all ages to enhance their lives through continuing education. This fund is administered by the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving through their scholarship program. There is a preference for members of our church, although others are considered for scholarship awards as well. A church committee works with the Hartford Foundation to provide input into the selection process. If you are interested in applying for this scholarship, you may obtain an application in the church office or download one from the

“info center” section of the church web site (umcofhartford.org). The deadline for applications this year is March 3, 2017. If you have questions, contact Peter Antos (peter@umcofhartford.org).



ALTAR FLOWERS

Our sanctuary is enhanced by flowers on the altar during worship on Sunday mornings. You can sign up now for an upcoming date on which you would like to honor or remember an event or loved one. The cost is \$35, and you should note “flowers” on the memo line of your check. You can sign up in the schedule book, which is now kept in the mail slots near the elevator outside the church office, or by phoning (860-523-5132) or emailing the church (staff@umcofhartford.org).

Remember: Wednesday, March 1st is Ash Wednesday



Jesus died for you. What will you do for Him?

MUSTARD SEED MINISTRY

It is Saturday night – and I am in my office – and impelled by the Holy Spirit to write this. It has been a remarkable week in the history of my family. As I write this, Doris, my beloved mother-in-law is at our home in a “home hospice” situation – surrounded by family members, many of whom are flying in from around the country to be with her.

The events of the past few weeks have underscored for me the vitality that each day brings – and a desire to do what I can with the time I have to deepen my faith, to witness to my faith, to love and serve Christ. So I know that Doris would be thrilled for me to be spending some time right now to share with you the gift I was given by God in the form of this “Mustard Seed Ministry.”

The idea for it came out of a sustained period of prayer – in which I have asked God to help me be a greater blessing to the church which I love so much. And thanks to many wonderful moments in the church in recent weeks – Dianne Antos’ passionate cry for examination, Harold Craig’s wonderful statement of commitment, Reverend Ken Kieffer’s hopeful, helpful optimism – and so much more, at one point God reminded me of the powerful spiritual principle of denial, and the amazing benefits which come from it.

Our Lord and Savior said, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” The Mustard Seed Ministry comes out of a simple idea – for me it was finding something in my life that was NOT a necessity – something I would be willing to try and do without – something that would save real money from my life/household budget to do so – and sharing the blessings with the church.

It struck me that I had this comfortable daily habit of buying an extra large Dunkin Donuts tea – costing \$2.91. Not something I really need, but something I like – and want. I decided to experiment to see if I could really do without it. For two weeks – up to last Sunday, I did. I have again this week. I have found that it has required moments of choice – of “self-denial.” I have found that by making those moment by moment choices, I feel closer to God. And I am thrilled to be able to be a blessing to my church.

I hope you might consider trying this. I am aware, having talked with some folks about this, that some in our congregation already practice something like this – and are pretty much “optimized” in terms of being a great steward of your resources. If that is the case, and this idea doesn’t make sense for you, by all means, don’t feel in any way obligated to try this.

But I am thrilled tomorrow to be adding an \$11.64 check labeled ‘mustard seed ministry’ to my normal weekly contribution. And I so believe that the mustard seed principle – something so small can be multiplied enormously – can be something we can put to use – to God’s glory – to get closer to God, to get closer to our brothers and sisters of UMCH, and also to be a benefit to our church.

I welcome an email conversation on this if any of you would like to. I have some ideas as to how this could grow. But first, it must sprout on its own – through the decisions and actions of people like you. I do believe that if a core of us will do this, and make discoveries, and get closer to God, and put in our own little “mustard seeds”, and tell others about it, great things can happen.

In this time of such high family focus, I am more grateful than ever before for the remarkable gift to the world of Jesus Christ, to the love of family – and to the fellowship of my brothers and sisters in Christ at the United Methodist Church. I hope to see many of you in church tomorrow.

John Brubaker

And he said to them, Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you. Matthew 17:20

And He said, How shall we picture the kingdom of God, or by what parable shall we present it? “It is like a mustard seed which, when sown upon the soil, though it is smaller than all the seeds that are upon the soil, yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and forms large branches; so that the birds of the air can nest under its shade.” Mark 4:30-32