



First Congregational Church

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

in Melrose

An Open and Affirming Congregation

Messenger

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Dusting off an Antique

I had a lot of blank faces looking back at me from the Confirmation Class when I tried to explain the significance of Ash Wednesday.

“What’s up with the ashes? Why start Lent that way?”

My explanations around the biblical tradition (it is a reminder that we were made from dust and to dust we will return, we are dependent on God, we are imperfect, it is an ancient symbol of confession...) didn’t seem to fly any better than my explanation that it is a sign of hope (the oil mixed with the ash is symbolic of the healing and wholeness that God offers).

Lots of blank faces. And, yes, I do get it. There isn’t much to grab on to in terms of a modern equivalent. The symbols don’t translate into something we know; especially in a church like ours that downplays original sin and instead lifts up God’s delight in us and trust that we will respond to God’s call.

The truth is, Ash Wednesday is getting outdated. Many churches have dropped these services altogether. Mainly because people just don’t come.

At the same time, just because something feels outdated and hard to relate to doesn’t mean that it isn’t valuable. After all, something isn’t around for a couple of thousand years without it having value!

Not only is this true of Ash Wednesday, but it is also true of the season of Lent as a whole. If we are honest, Lent feels awkward. It is heavy and uncomfortable. It teeters on the edge of depressing.

I would argue, however, that this is because we don’t see its value and haven’t done what our United Church of Christ calls us to do: “Make this faith our own.”

You are on the outside looking in if you think Lent is only about mea culpa after mea culpa and declaring in every way possible that we are “sinners in the hands of an angry God”. In the UCC, and First Congregational Church in particular, Lent is not about

unworthiness but about restoration. It is not about not saying “I am lost!” but about saying “Where’s the map?”

Like the ashes of Ash Wednesday, we are part of something very old in the season of Lent. Yet we all know, if you polish up an antique it can be a very valuable gift.

I assure you that if you come at Lent with intentionality, hope, and an openness to a loving God, your faith and your life will be recalibrated and enlivened with meaning and purpose. You will remember not only who and whose you are, but also your place in this world, why you are here and what God is calling you to do.

It may be an old map, but Lent still leads to the same place—through the cross to a resurrecting God. As long as you follow the same route, there is nothing wrong with inputting the destination into your GPS.

Modernizing Lent only takes the dust off. In fact, we might say that doing so is like digital imaging that gets down to the original drawing, the original intent, of the artist: that Lent isn’t about self-hatred but about the companionship of the divine through every season of our lives.

See you in church,

Sunday, March 19, 2017

9:00 AM – Morning Star Voices Rehearsal

10:00 AM – WORSHIP and Sunday School

11:15 AM – Coffee Hour

11:30 AM - Lenten Adult Education Class, Library

7:00 PM – Confirmation Class

DURING THE WEEK

Tuesday, March 21

7:15 to 8:15 PM – Morning Star Voices Rehearsal

Wednesday, March 22

7:00 PM – Racial Justice Meeting, Library

7:15 PM – Bells rehearsal

Thursday, March 23

6:00 PM – Music Director Search Committee, Music Room

Friday, March 24

5:00 PM – Wedding Rehearsal, Sanctuary

Saturday, March 25

3:00 PM – Wedding, Sanctuary

Sunday, March 26

11:30 AM - Lenten Adult Education Class, Library

7:00 PM – Confirmation Class



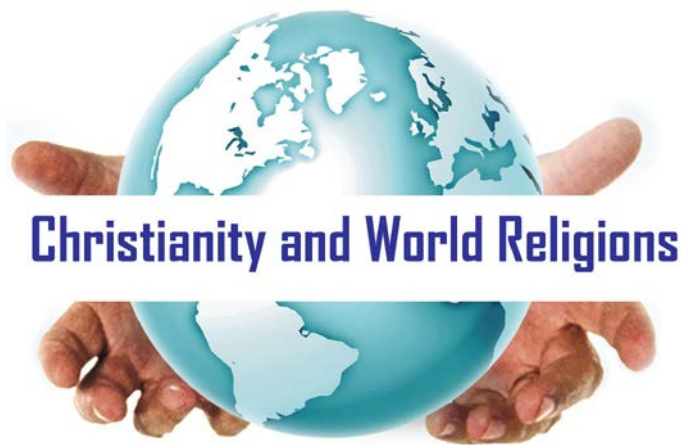
Brian Johnson, Bob Hughes, Ray Luebbe (Betsy Garrett’s father), Mary Sakata and Becky Faro (Trish Faro’s daughters), Nyal Fuentes, Claire Griffin, Bill Copeland, Merle Copeland, Gem Colvin, Dot Allen, Bob Pierce, Anne Wing, Ella Boyle, Scott Chisholm.



SUNDAY SCHOOL:

High School class will be a Coaching Session: A faithful approach to coaching and working with others. This interactive unit will challenge our high school youth to focus on character development when working with others and will include hands-on application with our church's children.

We will need a second adult in the K to 2 Class. Please call Lisa or Sherri if you are able to serve in this capacity



**LENTEN ADULT EDUCATION CLASS
CHRISTIANITY AND WORLD RELIGIONS**
After worship each Sunday of Lent

Join Rev. Dominic in the Library after worship during Lent for a discussion based class that will look at world religions through the lens of our own faith tradition. The classes are not built upon each other so you are welcome to join at any point. The classes will be group discussion based and all are welcome. Each class will begin with a starter video from Adam Hamilton outlining the topic of the day. These will include an Introduction Session on how questions around world religions are framed, followed by sessions on Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity.

While Christianity is the largest religion in the world today, there are billions of people who practice other faiths. In this series we will learn the salient features of these other major religions from a Christian perspective in order to lift up points of similarity and difference. Doing so will allow us to better own what it is we believe about our own faith, approach other religions with reverence and respect, and build bridges by learning from other traditions while sharing our own.

HELP OUR REFUGEE IMMIGRATION MINISTRY CLIENTS!

As so many times in the past, our RIM cluster is in need of some emergency help. At a time when asylum seekers and refugees are feeling very vulnerable, we want to strongly support our clients and reassure them. To do this, we need your help:

1. We must pay rent of \$2300/ month and have not been able to make last month's payment in full. We would welcome financial donations, checks made out to RIM and designated for MetroNorth cluster, and put in the offering plate. Housing is our biggest expense.
2. Our Egyptian family in Wakefield is in need of some extra assistance. The good news is that they now have their work permit, the dad (a dentist) has earned a certificate that allows him to do some dental work in areas of need if he can find such a job, and he is working very hard studying for the next level test while working part-time as a dishwasher. The bad news is that the mother is still having trouble with her foot and will need more surgery so cannot work. The family (includes a 10-year-old boy and an eight-year-old girl) are in need of food assistance and household goods. If you could donate personal items like shampoo, soap, lotion, toothpaste, Kleenex, etc. or stuff like dishwashing liquid, laundry detergent, paper towels, toilet paper, that would be most welcome. I will leave a basket in the narthex for donations. Gift cards for Market Basket or any supermarket in Wakefield would be great too.

After two years with the four of them in a one-bedroom apartment, they have been able to move upstairs to a two-bedroom apartment, which is great, but there are no lights in the bedrooms. If you have an extra lamp or two, please bring them to the church and let Susan in the office know where they are.

Thanking you in advance for your help...you always step up when needed!

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- The following groups meet here regularly:**
Boy Scouts – Tuesdays at 7:00 PM in the basement
Girl Scouts – Sundays, 3:00 to 5:00 PM
Al-Anon – weekdays at 12 noon, Sunday at 1 & 7 PM – Rm. 8
Blue of a Kind – Mondays at 7:00 PM in the Music Room
S.A.R.P. – Mondays and Tuesdays at 6:30 PM, Lounge
Tai Chi for Arthritis – Wednesdays at 10:00 AM, Room 8
A.A. – Mondays at 4:30 PM, & 7:00 PM (men), Tuesdays at 4:30 PM, Wednesdays at 4:30 PM & 7:30 PM, Thursdays at 4:30 PM and 7:00 PM, Fridays at 4:30 PM and 8:00 PM and Saturdays at 9:00 AM (men) and 3:00 PM – Rm. 8

READY FOR Spring?



Easter Memorial Flowers - \$15 per plant

Send your order form by April 7th to: Darby Drafts, 25 Adams St., Melrose MA 02176, (Last minute orders may be handed to Darby on Sunday, April 9th.)

Ordered by: _____

Phone #: _____

IN MEMORY OF:

of plants ordered _____ Amount enclosed \$ _____

Please make checks payable to First Congregational Church.



EASTER FLOWERS



By Lighting our Church Steeple in memory or in honor of loved ones, you can help our church financially. Contact the church office (781-665-2111 or info@fccmelrose.org) to sign up for a week beginning on a Sunday. Your gift will be announced in the Sunday Bulletin and “*The Messenger*”. A \$25.00 per week contribution is suggested.

MEMORIAL FLOWERS

Have you ever considered giving flowers in memory or in honor of a loved one? There is a silk bouquet in the sanctuary at all times that can be “given” in memory. You can make a donation to the Flower Fund of \$15 and those flowers can be in memory /honor of your loved one for a given Sunday. If you prefer, fresh flowers can be ordered for you. The cost for fresh flowers is \$50 to \$75 depending on the size you would like. After the service, fresh flowers can be taken by the donor, or if they prefer, they can be distributed to someone in the congregation that is sick or in need of an uplifting gift. If you would be interested in donating either type of flowers, please call or email Susan in the church office. 781-665-2111 or info@fccmelrose.org.

