

*United in Spirit and
inspired by God's grace,
we welcome all, love all,
and seek justice for all.*

UCC Mission Statement

The newsletter of First Congregational United Church of Christ

UNITED IN CHRIST'S LOVE,
WE SEEK A JUST WORLD
FOR ALL.



PASTOR'S MESSAGE

Welcome back...

I know that not all of us were gone this summer but it seems only fitting to welcome you all back at the beginning of a new program year here at First. So much has happened over the summer that it feels like a new beginning. As you read through the pages of this Window you can catch some of the blessed business (and busyness) of these past few months and be brought up to speed about coming events!

What all this business is about will help us to live even more fully into what it means to "Be the Church" in the 21st century. As we explore the richness of that call this year we will consider our response to The Three Great Loves, to learning about and acting to end racism, to worshipping more fully, and to growing in love of God, one another, and our neighbors. We will also celebrate with other congregations, serve the poor, rejoice with those who will be married and baptized, and come together to enjoy one another.

"Being the Church" is a wonderful and textured thing to explore! We should come to the months ahead with wonder and awe, as well as sincere openness so that we can see with fresh eyes and love with supple hearts.

Let us move together, catching the Spirit that blows where it will, and find ourselves transformed and sent once again as God's people.

Peace,
Pastor Mark Suriano

MODERATOR'S MESSAGE

When I started to write this, we were just days past the events that took place in Charlottesville VA and like so many, I was stunned and sickened by what I saw. I simply could not wrap my head around what I was seeing. In fact, when I did try to make sense of it, it felt like my brain just froze up. I was that overwhelmed with feelings of disbelief, anger and loss.

Since I had some time before the Window deadline and was clearly not in the right headspace to write anything helpful or reflective, I put this writing aside for a little while. And honestly, if I'd kept going, it would've sounded more like a therapy session than a Window article. Pretty sure you'll thank me for that decision! ☺

Since then though, I've read articles, editorials and opinion pieces on racism in America. I've read Mark's pastoral letter to us several times and attended the vigils in Westwood and Park Ridge. I've gone to worship and prayed. I've talked with friends and family about how they are feeling and what it is they do to gain some perspective. And it has all helped. It isn't everything I need to do, but it has helped. I absolutely have gained some perspective since that horrible Saturday in Charlottesville but I haven't lost any of the anger. It is muted but still there. I am also no longer blind to the fact that my white privilege has for too long allowed me to ignore (at best) and deny (at worst) the racism problem in this country. I don't think I can feel good about calling myself a Christian if I don't at least try to do something about that.

So, I have my copy of "Between the World and Me" which I will read during our brief trip to Lake George this weekend. It's so quiet and peaceful there, a perfect place for reflection. And when we return to the hustle and bustle that is our daily life, I look forward to the book discussions Pastor Mark has planned for us over the coming months, even though I know they will make me uncomfortable. It is my fervent hope that you will all attend.

Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me...

Sue

WORSHIP NOTES

Calendar for September

September 3, 2017

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost/Joint Communion Sunday

Romans 12:9-21 and Matthew 16:21-28

September 10, 2017

Three Great Loves: Love of Neighbor

Romans 13:8-14 and Matthew 18:15-20

September 17, 2017

Three Great Loves: Love of Children

Exodus 33:12-23 and 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

September 24, 2017

Three Great Loves: Love of Creation

Genesis 1 and Romans 8:22-24

Three Great Loves



Throughout the month of September, we will focus on The Three Great Loves offered to the churches of the United Church of Christ by our General Minister and President, Rev. John Dorhauer. We pray, learn, and sing, about each of the three themes: Love of Neighbor, Love of Children, and Love of Creation.

You will also be encouraged to join one of three teams that will explore ways that we can organize ourselves around these three themes for the next two years until June 2019. Your input and work will be critical to the growth of our ministry and to the relevance of our faith.

Choirs Begin

On September 10, Jeff will direct a walk-in choir rehearsal at 9:00 a.m. and lead the choir in the anthem during worship that day.

Choir rehearsals for both the Chancel and Bell Choirs will begin on September 13. Bell Choir meets in the Sanctuary at 7:00 p.m. and Chancel Choir meets in the Choir Room at 8:15 p.m.

Sanctuary Updates

You will notice that the Worship Team has researched and purchased some updated items for the Sanctuary! Thanks to funding from the Memorial Fund we have new paraments (those hangings from the Pulpit and Lectern), new candle sticks and holders, and new offering plates.

You will also notice that we have brought the communion table from the original church up from the Chapel and will be using it for the candles and flowers during worship and for communion service on the first Sunday of the month.

MISSION TEAM

Tricky Tray Fundraiser for Disabled Vets

Saturday, Nov. 4th will be a night of music, fun and lots of great items to win; all to benefit disabled American Veterans. The mission team has been organizing a fundraiser to benefit our Veterans on **Saturday, Nov. 4th**. While you listen and dancing to the music, we will have some fantastic tricky tray baskets to take a chance on. If you know a company or merchant who would donate to our Tricky Tray for the Vets there is a letter which you can solicit the gift. **(Ask a team member for letter & donation register. We need all donations in by October 1st, to have enough time to print up the donation brochure and wrap all the baskets).** Maybe they have corporate sports tickets, or would donate sports memorabilia or time at a vacation home, or theatre tickets, restaurant gift certificates, etc.

Our team members have divided up the different towns to solicit but if you know someone personally please let us know. If you are interested in helping with this fundraiser you can go to <http://www.signupgenius.com/go/30e0e4ba5aa23a7fa7-> where you can see the different jobs we need help with. Just a few of them are: decorating team, setting up, advertising, selling tickets, soliciting the donation of tricky tray items, wrapping the baskets, donation and donor acknowledgement brochure, Tricky tray winner announcer, etc... To date we have donations of restaurant certificates, Nail salons, Hair Salon, and massages to name a few items. For more information on the charity DAV – Disabled American Veterans go to <https://www.dav.org/learn-more/about-dav/>

Neighbors in Need (NIN)

Neighbors in Need is a special mission offering of the UCC that supports ministries of justice and compassion throughout the United States. One-third of NIN funds support the Council for American Indian Ministry(CAIM). Two-thirds of the offering is used by the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries (JWM) to support a variety of justice initiatives, advocacy efforts, and direct service projects through grants.

Neighbors in Need also awards grants to churches and organizations doing justice work in their communities. These grants fund projects whose work ranges from direct service to community organizing and advocacy to address systemic injustice. Funding is provided through donations to the Neighbors in Need offering.

The 2017 theme for the NIN offering is "Protect the Sacred: In a Just World, Clean Water is Life." You will be hearing more about this offering each Sunday in September leading up to **Oct. 1st when we will be taking the offering for Neighbor in Need Offering.**

Family Promise***Family Center*** –

Our Saturday in July was canceled as the one family was going to be gone for the entire day. Thank you to all who volunteered to be there!

Thank you to Amanda Sheridan and her daughter, Astrid, Debbie Collins, Julie Bliss and Debbie Terrace for volunteering to give of their time at the family center in August. Your next available opportunity to volunteer at the center is Saturday, September 23rd.

OLM Shelter –

Saturday, July 8th dinner through Saturday, July 15th breakfast. This year we have tried something different and we shared the combined time with our friends at OLM. We had a single sign up board created by Joni and Ron von Autenried from OLM. Thank you to all who have signed up to cook dinner, Mary, Christina, Amanda & Jessica Chongoushian, Andi Albies, Sue Bonvissuto, Lois and Debbie Terrace; sleepover, Jon & Julie Bliss; dinner hosts, Mary Chongoushian & her daughters, Lois Terrace and Jeanne Sabatie; play time hosts Debbie Terrace; or donated breakfast and lunch supplies, Sue Goll & Theresa Muti, Carol & Bob Kobbe and Nancy Goodyear.

There was just one family but we had a great time with them. Thank you again to everybody for supporting this mission!!!!

Fair Trade Chocolate and Coffee

When you buy a Fair-Trade product, you are helping small farmers grow a high-quality product and earn a livable wage. Equal Exchange helps the small farmers get their products out to us without a lot of hands in the coffee or chocolate, which helps keep them competitive in the organic marketplace. A percentage of every UCC order goes to help a poor community in Virginia with getting fresh affordable vegetables at a local farmers market.

A Fair-Trade order will be placed September 25th all order forms need to be in by Sunday, September 24th. See the narthex for order forms or ask Debbie Terrace.

Crop Walk –

Save the date Sunday, October 22nd, it will start at the Pascack Reformed Church.

Mission Team next meeting: September to be announced

Team members: Cate Hutchison, Pastor Mark, Susanna Willingham, Gina Napolitano and Debbie Terrace, leader.

A JUST WORLD FOR ALL

Prayer Rally in Love and Solidarity

On Monday evening August 21 the ministers, rabbis, and cantors from the Upper Pascack Valley Ministers hosted a prayer rally at Veterans Park in Park Ridge. This rally was in response to the rise of fascist, Neo-Nazi, and White Supremacist groups gathering in Virginia and elsewhere and in support of our Jewish friends, people of color, and LGBTQ people everywhere.

The rally was attended by 90 people who prayed, sang, and committed themselves to love and action to confront the voices of hatred and supremacy that are now marching freely in the light of day.



Cornell West says that justice is love in action, and we at First will be intentionally engaging in difficult but important reflection over the next few months about who we are as followers of Jesus and what we must do to create a world of real justice and love.

Thank you to the eight congregations represented at the rally and to all who come out for justice!

Pastoral Letter on Racism

A Pastoral Letter on Racism

Friends in Christ, members, and friends of First Congregational United Church of Christ, I am writing to you today about racism. I am doing so in light of the events in Charlottesville last weekend and the subsequent response to that event by the President, both of which have compelled me to, finally, step up as a theologian and a pastor.

First, I must acknowledge my complicity in allowing the moral outrage of racism, overt or covert, to continue to remain unaddressed in the places I have served. I have known about racism for many for years now but have consistently shrunk from the responsibilities of my position. This is something my white privilege allowed me to do, and is something that I confess to you and to God, and for which I not only seek forgiveness but the fortitude to rectify. I hear Jesus' chilling words to the Pharisees of his day ringing in my ears, "If you were blind there would be no sin in that, but 'We see' you say, yet your sin remains." (John 9:41)

In Romans 12:2 St. Paul writes: "Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good, acceptable, and perfect." The pattern of this world, our world as citizens of the United States, has been tainted from its very beginning by the overt evils of slavery, Jim Crow, redlining of neighborhoods, unjust mass incarceration of people of color—particularly African Americans—and by thousands of less definable but still very real systemic injustices that take shape in everything from civil laws to the religious sanctioning of hatred by so-called Christian preachers.

For us, that is to say for white people, we have largely lived in ignorance of all of this, perhaps even willful ignorance of it, preferring to believe that we

are citizens of an exceptional and unquestionably moral society, where only evil gets punished and bad people penalized. This pattern, this morally corrupt presumption, puts our nation and our society in a place of honor that only God should occupy.

Further, the myth of our perfection and superiority prevents us from engaging in the honest self-reflection that leads to repentance and the renewal of our collective mind so that we can know what is *good, acceptable, and perfect*. To be thus transformed creates space for values and actions that support a more just society and nation.

The rise of fascism in the guise of White Supremacist and neo-Nazi groups and its validation by President Trump this past August are of deep moral concern. There were wars fought about these things, and the victory was, and still should be, with the freedom extended to all the children of God and to the just world of God's making. To claim moral equivalence between the peaceful and non-violent counter-protestors and the fascist groups gathered in Charlottesville is to espouse a morality that is neither Christian nor respectful of the lives of those who have died in the cause of justice.

If we are to live faithfully, not conformed to the pattern of this world, fraught as it is with the original sin of racism, we must lay our minds and our hearts open to the piercing love of God who bids us to live as disciples of Christ in "spirit and in truth." (John 4:24) Spirit strengthens us and urges us on while the truth sets us free—both spirit and truth are gifts of God for a moment such as this.

I do not know precisely where the renewal of the collective mind of our congregation will lead regarding racism, white privilege, or how we are to be Christ in this world, but I do know that we must start down that road. I know this in my heart, I am convicted by the truth of it, and I want you to join with me in breaking our conformity to the *pattern of the world* and be transformed by the *renewing of your mind*.

I will start today by inviting you to read the book *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates so that we can discuss it on September 10 at a forum I will hold following worship that morning. This slim book, less than 100 pages, is a series of letters he writes to his fifteen-year-old son about the world, words of advice and understanding that comes from a black father to his black son. As you read it I challenge you to avoid arguing about the truth of it—it is the particular *experience of a man* that reflects a *universal experience of a people* who live in a world that is not the one we imagine it to be.

Our discussion on September 10 will be a reflection on what we have learned, what has made us uncomfortable, and what has stung our hearts. We will not be discussing strategies or what to do—at least not until we have come to understand much more than we currently do about the realities of racism and privilege. After this initial reading, I will propose several more books, one at a time, that we will discuss together so that we can begin to own our thoughts before moving to a collective agreement on actions. Meanwhile, I hope that all of you who can will attend prayer rallies, marches, and demonstrations, write your elected leaders, your newspapers, and pray daily for our world, our country, and ourselves.

May God who has begun this good work in us bring it to completion.
Pastor Mark Suriano

FAITH FORMATION

Children's Ministries

Sunday School

Welcome to Sunday School for 2017! We have a new space near the Sanctuary and are ready for our youngsters age 3-12 years old to join us every Sunday morning. This year we will be using a new One Room Schoolhouse curriculum that will be a wonderful addition to our ministry with children.

Children will begin at worship and will be sent out for class after the Children's Moment. On Communion Sunday, the children will return to worship for communion with their families.

Sunday School will begin on October 1, activities will be available for children through the month of September.

Messy Church

Messy Church will resume on October 7 from 4-6 p.m.

If you are interested in helping with the meal, activities, or story telling please let Carrie know at office@firstuccparkridge.org as soon as possible. Further dates for Messy Church are November 18 and December 16.

Youth Ministry

Youth Group

Youth Group will return October 1 as part of our Homecoming Sunday where we will schedule the rest of the year of gatherings, service projects, and trips. Youth group is open to all youth between 7th and 12th grade.

Confirmation

All youth 7th through 12 grade who are interested in exploring Confirmation and their parents are welcome to an exploratory session following worship on September 24 following worship.

Adult Ministries

Wednesday Bible Study

Wednesday Bible Study will begin September 20 at 12:30 p.m. in the Parlor. We will be studying the Gospel of Matthew until Advent. Books will be available for sale beginning September 10.

Exploring our Reformation Faith

This four-part discussion will take place October 5, 12, 19, and 26 at 7:30 p.m. This brief study will help us prepare for our celebration of the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation on October 29. Pastor Mark has the booklets that will guide the discussion and will make them available on September 10.

MISSION MOMENT



UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST

It seems like such an easy thing, doesn't it? Love good and hate evil. Who wouldn't go along with that

as a life motto? There's an opportunity here for coffee mugs and t-shirts. The "Loving Good, Hating Evil" line of products. The front of the t-shirts – "LOVE GOOD." The back – "HATE EVIL." And truly, if you don't have some evil in this world to hate then you probably aren't paying attention. However, there is a danger here, says Paul the Apostle. Paul's letter to the Romans cautions that that we could be overcome by evil. Don't become the evil you hate, says Paul.

Hate visited two UCC congregations earlier this year. It came in the form of spray-painted racist slogans and swastikas. It came to downtown Medford, Oregon, where posters appeared that said, "Imagine a Muslim-Free America." It came to Annandale, Virginia, when anti-Semitic slurs were painted on a Jewish Community Center. In both cities, UCC houses of worship were also defaced—attacked for their radical inclusion and extravagant welcome to all people. In Oregon, the Medford Congregational United Church of Christ, and, in Virginia, The Little River United Church of Christ both had their buildings defaced with graffiti.

It seems that opening one's doors to all people, while expressing the good news to some, is a reason for fear and loathing to others. The question for Christians is not simply that we stand up to evil but how we do it. "When we go through something traumatic like this it's important to be witnesses, that we see it, to understand what happened, to recognize the hatred that was here and move through that, and through these wounds we can begin to move forward," says the Rev. David Lindsey, pastor of Little River United Church of Christ. Little River found companions in their community who came to wash the red paint from their walls and gathered together with them in a prayer vigil.

In Medford, the congregants, along with townspeople, handed out posters that read "Hate has no Business Here." The signs were all over town, at businesses on people's lawns and in front of the church, flooding the community with expressions of love and welcome. The congregation also decided it was time to get serious about discussing white privilege among themselves and in the community. Our congregations know how to fight evil without becoming hateful.

PROPERTY UPDATES

- The Parking Lots have been repaired, sealed, and striped.
- The roof will be replaced on the CE building this fall.
- The new Sunday school room has been painted and carpeted.
- Bathrooms on the upper level are finished.
- Lighting in the Sanctuary has been updated to new LED lighting and the switches in the Narthex have been replaced and are now of a uniform type.



CELEBRATIONS

Septembers Birthdays!

2 – John Goll
David Huber

15 – Pete Von Bradsky

21 – Evan Dopf
Sue Goll

28 – Jennifer Zuccaro



Congratulations to Brianne Rauch and Matthew Blanchard on the Baptism of their son Knox, on July 23, 2017.



Congratulations to Alexis Chalmers and Richard Nebeling who will be married at First on September 30, 2017.



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