

The Pioneer

'preparing for others to follow'

Newsletter of the Preble Congregational Church
United Church of Christ
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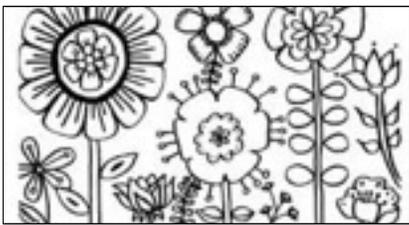
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~ September, 2016 ~

...from the Pastor's Pen...

Dear Friends,

"Don't water the weeds – instead, water the flowers that grow in your heart."



For many years, after working the Twelve Steps with the guidance of a strong sponsor, I, too, sponsored people who wanted to recover from an addiction. A sponsor is one who companions others who work through the twelve steps.

We "Steppers" could lead others only after we had completed the Steps ourselves, because we first needed to experience the effort and commitment needed for recovery.

The Twelve Steps helped me shed the blinders on my own eyes, give up trying to control everything (especially for other people), take responsibility for my own unhealthy behaviors, and see myself as an ordinary person, loved and accepted by God just as I was. The work didn't end after completing the 12th Step, however. It became a way of living.

In "recovery" (as it is called), a person continues to affirm healthy choices on a daily basis, and most importantly, walks with others on their journeys of recovery. The whole pilgrimage is not only about recovery from addictive practices and behaviors, but about *living in healthy, loving, and connected relationships with God and other people.*

It's easy to fall into – or develop - negative thought patterns. When we are used to harming ourselves and others by word and deed, change happens only when we become desperate enough to choose to break the negative pattern.

We may insist that the negative ideas we hold about ourselves are true, when in fact much of our personal story is just habit, something we are used to telling ourselves because we've heard it or repeated it for so long that it becomes automatic, familiar, and "normal."

"I'm not lovable." "God could not love me like God loves others." "People don't really like me." A 12-Stepper calls these ideas "illness thoughts." But hark! All is not lost! We *can* change!

There is a key to changing the way we think about ourselves and to building better relationships with others. In the Twelve Step process, the key is found in Step 2, when we admit we are unable to change by ourselves and we seek the help of a “higher power, greater than ourselves.” For most of us, that power is God, and when we partner with God, we find strength in surprising places. Positive progress towards life-saving change becomes possible.

Whatever change-process you want to try, changing negativity in your life is well worth the effort, and requires willingness and a commitment to self-reflection and honesty. We have to let go of finger-pointing and resistance to change.

The thing is, once we begin to feel the wonderful effects of replacing negativity with affirmation, we are blessed with love and acceptance and relief and strength. We handle difficult situations more wisely, and best of all, we discover that we can understand and help others because we’ve taken the same kind of journey. This is the way to build harmony. This is the way to grow God’s kingdom right here on earth. This is what God asks of us.

All of which brings me back to the opening sentence, which can also be written like this: “Water and nourish the flowers of your heart, and you will have no room for the weeds.”

We nurture that which we plant. Negative thoughts are like weeds – plant them, nourish them, and they will grow. But positive and healthy thoughts are the lovely flowers already planted by God in your heart and soul, and they will absolutely flourish with generous care and attention. They will easily crowd out the weeds.

God’s presence is the garden; your TLC is the Miracle-Gro.
May you all grow a healthy and beautiful garden,
People of God!



In faith and love,
Pastor Becky

When life is hard and sad, when you have failed yourself and others,
when you have done or said things that seem impossible to face or to own,
when you are scared and on the run,
God’s hand is stretched out still. (Isa 10:4b)

~ Martin Copenhaver, UCC Daily Devotional, August 5.2016~

Harvest of Faith



Have you enjoyed this season's delicious sweet corn grown in local fields by our nearby farmers? How about fresh chard? Tomatoes? Potatoes? Cucumbers?

Peppers? You know what I'm talkin' about – our valley harvests great foods in wonderful abundance for humans and animals, both.

Well, our church "produces", too. Every Sunday during our Mission Moment, Annette Benson raises up mission opportunities, and we faithfully gather resources to help those in need through our Community Food Pantry and donations given to Global Mission Projects sponsored by the UCC and others.

And, of course, we care for our own church, as well. This rural chapel has long been a beacon of God's love in our surrounding community. We share a fascinating history of faith and presence going way back to the time of the Military Tract settlements in the early 1800's and before, as the second-oldest church in the valley area.

We follow a long line of saints who loved this church and prayed for its mission and longevity, and so we do what we can to care for this beautiful building and its congregation. We decided as a congregation three years ago to begin a new fund raiser called the "Harvest of Faith," which begins in May and ends with the harvest in October, dedicated to this purpose.



Each month, we each put aside \$10 to give, in the end, to the church as a faith harvest contribution. October is coming soon! And we hope the harvest will be bountiful!

Blessings to all of you, and thank you.

Your Church Council and the various
Boards and Committees

Exploring "White Privilege"

The United Church of Christ nationally is presenting seminars, workshops, and learning opportunities to explore the topic of white privilege and how it affects our ability to live well with people who are different from us.

In a racially diverse nation such as ours, accepting and understanding one another so that we can live side by side in harmony and respect can be and is often difficult. We are not the best judges of how successfully we live and work together with others, because we view life from our own cultural and social perspective.

Learning how to recognize and let go of our own biases is something we don't even know we need to do, and likewise with learning to see ourselves.

The UCC is asking churches to join the conversation, and we aren't the only ones ready to talk about it. Confronting white privilege as a justice issue is being explored by many other denominations and organizations.

Stay tuned for more information and opportunity to learn about this topic!

Adult Bible Study Begins!

The regular Tuesday evening Bible study will meet again after a summer recess on September 20 at 6:30 in the Riehlman Room.



All who are interested are invited to come for Bible study, book study, and conversation around the topic of the evening. It's always informative as we think and talk about God's presence in our lives and how scripture helps to guide our life choices.

During Advent and Easter, we study devotionals related to those special times in the Christian year. Between those seasons, we delve into other topics. We hope you'll join our discussions this year!

Stewardship Season



Dear Friends,

Your trustees are beginning to gather information for budget-preparation purposes, and will soon ask us to consider the 2017 monetary needs of our board and committees as well as our individual pledge offerings for the support of God's missions and church.

Please consider this "notice" as a heads-up to begin your own prayerful reflections about this important aspect of church membership and friendship.

To that end, I chose Emily Heath's recent UCC Daily Devotional for inclusion in the September Pioneer. Please read on....

The Privilege of Giving

Emily C. Heath

"During a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints." - 2 Corinthians 8:2-4

My wife and I have a small list of institutions we support. Each month we give to our churches, public radio, our alma maters, the counseling center where my mentor serves, and a few others. These are far from extravagant gifts. They are just small monthly debits that, taken by themselves, hardly seem significant at times.

And yet, when I look at my bank account, I like seeing that money go out. I know that at my college the LGBT center has a few more resources. I know that down in Georgia someone in crisis is closer to seeing a therapist. And I know that when I listen to the news on the radio, I've done my part to help pay for it.

I see giving to the organizations I support as a privilege. In some small way, I get to be a part of work that is greater than myself.

Most churches dread stewardship season. We feel like we are running a pledge drive that everyone hates. We bring out budgets and expense reports, present them with dour faces and negative tones,

and then wonder why no one wants to help us meet the bottom line.

But the reality is that Americans give generously. Over \$375 billion last year, in fact. And, fully 84% of Millennials made a donation in 2014. So why do we struggle in the church?

My sense is because we have stopped being inspirational in our requests for support, and have instead focused on doomsday scenarios: "If we don't meet this budget, this church will be dead soon," or "How can we support the children's ministry when there is a deficit?" So we cut out churches to the bare bones. But our austerity measures fail to inspire a vision that anyone wants to give to. And so we cut again. We create a self-fulfilling prophecy.



Show me a church with vision.
Show me one that inspires joy.
Make me feel like supporting your ministry is a privilege. Do that, and I'll open my wallet in a heartbeat, and thank you for it.

Prayer

God, help us to cultivate joy in our vision, and to inspire joyful givers. Amen.

Emily C. Heath is the Senior Pastor of the Congregational Church in Exeter, New Hampshire.

...From Richard Rohr, 8/15/16...

Presence is experienced in a participative way, not by thinking about it. The mind, by nature, is intent on judging, controlling, and analyzing instead of seeing, tasting, and loving.

The mind wants a job and believes that its job is to process things by its own criteria. The key to stopping this obsessive game is, quite simply, peace, silence, or stillness.

Silence is God's primary language; "everything else is a poor translation," as Fr. Thomas Keating wisely observes. Please think about that and how it is true.



September Celebrations

September 3: Donna Swayze

10: Lee Benson

14: Jeanne Underwood

17: Cullen Waffner

18: Jeffrey Van Patten

Margaret and Eric Shirley

Anniversary

23: Burdette Swayze

Jordan Lieber

27: Stephen Swayze

28: Jan Jeffers

Jean Henderson

30: Alan Masters

Linda Underwood



Yes it is time for our youth to be returning to school. We wish them all a fun and successful year. It will be good to see their school friends again.

It will also be time to get everyone back to Sunday School for the fall. Although we have had classes all summer we know that some of you have been busy with summer activities and vacations. Our teachers

are anxious to see you all and have **everyone** back. Come and help the teachers decide what you would like to do in class this year.

Some special ideas were discussed at the last Christian Education meeting but we want the youth to help direct our ideas for the year.



Joy in the Morning

By Joy Niswender

Philippians 4:11 “Not that I speak in respect of want: For I have learned in whatever state I am, therewith be content.”

I don't know about you, but there are times when I'm anything but content! It so often seems the “world is too much with us”. We worry about health, our children, and the world situation, and in most cases can't do much about it. Oh, we can reach for better parenting, take our vitamins and see our doctor on a regular basis, but can only pray for our county and this mixed up world.

The apostle Paul had it right when he learned to be content, no matter what, and Paul had every right to be uneasy! It's easier said than done. When discontent rears its discontending head it's time to rely on the faith we claim to hold dear.

Jesus didn't die for us to go around being in a constant state of worry. I truly believe he wants us to live life more fully, appreciating his many blessings. Someone has said we should live in as large a world as possible. We should travel light, look to the One that loves us unconditionally, and rejoice in each day. Things will not always go perfectly, but to be content no matter what is a gift to ourselves and our world.



As our children return to school and we settle back into our ordinary Fall routines, our church will continue to serve the community around us with love and hope and gratitude for the support you give to us through the Community Food Pantry,

worship attendance, and in all other ways.

Wherever you are on your life and spiritual journeys, you are always welcome here in this church.

Have a happy and safe fall season!

