

# February 2017 Monthly Update

*Dear Members and Friends,*

*This January, whether inspired or just a little full of myself, I declared this the **Year of Hope** for Union Church. My hope is that by pointing out to each other examples of such things as generosity, kindness, inclusion, grass roots leadership, etc. we will feel supported in the present and suspended in hope for the future as well as encouraged to be all that we can be as individuals and as community.*

*We have many challenges ahead. Our planet continues to be mistreated. Our world is war torn. There are several "hot spots" that could erupt at any time. There are frequent acts of terrorism and the constant threat of terrorism, mass violence around the globe and an insular, self-protectionism in countries that have the space and resources to welcome and support refugees, but don't. This country continues to be politically divided and hate groups seem emboldened to act out. And perhaps most demoralizing to many in our church community is President Trump's recent executive order barring U.S entry to refugees and immigrants from certain Muslim-majority countries.*

*What better time is there to pray for hope? What better time to seek out and share the signs of hope that do exist around us? What better time is there to trust in the presence of a gracious God who has always, throughout history, been in and with his people, in the midst of turmoil?*

*So I invite you to share your experiences of hope verbally in conversations at our coffee hours, in your own words or from your reading for the Sunday bulletin inserts or monthly updates, in songs or poems for our services, in whatever ways you feel moved to do your part to keep us strong, uplifted and at peace.*

*Let us continue to be a loving community of peace and presence by the sea for each other and a beacon of hope for all to see.*

*Love,*

*Nancy*

Thanks to Anne Murray who often sends me spiritual jewels. The following is from *Walking the Way of Hope: A Retreat for Women's Christmas* by JAN RICHARDSON

#### Where Hope Begins

"A seed in the ground. A flame in the darkness. A hand outstretched. A child in the womb. Hope starts small and overtakes us, stretching the borders of what we have known.

One "yes" to an angel and a young woman named Mary becomes a revolutionary. The child is hardly noticeable in her womb when she arrives at the home of her kinswoman Elizabeth, but the transformation is written all over her face, and Elizabeth instantly intuits what has happened. She blesses Mary for her hope, for her radical belief that God will fulfill the promise made by Gabriel. Elizabeth, pregnant in her advanced years, knows the power of hope. She, too, carries it in her womb. Her ears ringing with Elizabeth's blessing, Mary pours out a song, a cry of hope that echoes the one raised by her foremother Hannah after giving birth to Samuel. The powerful brought down from their thrones! The lowly raised up! The hungry filled with good things! The rich sent away empty! But Mary sings about these things as though they have already happened! A tiny child in her womb, and God has transformed the world? What sort of outrageous hope is this? Mary knows in her soul, in her womb, that radical hope is found at the boundary where the outrageous gives way to the possible. A child given to her aged kinswoman? The courage to say yes to Gabriel's invitation to her, an unwed woman? Well, then God might as well have turned the world into one where all things are possible! Even justice. Even freedom. Mary knows that some things are so outrageous that sometimes we have to talk about them as if they have already happened in order to believe they could ever come about. And so if we believe that God has brought justice to the world, we live that justice, and we share in making the world more just.

If we believe that God has brought healing to the world, we live that healing, and we share in making the world more whole. Hope starts small, even as a seed in the womb, but it feeds on outrageous possibilities. It beckons us to step out with the belief that the action we take will not only bear fruit but that in taking it, we have already made a difference in the world. God invites us, like Mary, to open to God's radical leading, to step out with sometimes inexplicable faith, trusting that we will find sustenance.

"Hope," writes W. Paul Jones in *Trumpet at Full Moon*, "is the simple trust that God has not forgotten the recipe for manna." The hope of God contains the promise that we will be fed, even if we never see the fruit of our hope-filled actions.

*Where does your hope begin? Where does hope live in you—how do you notice it in your body? When has someone shown up in a way that enabled you to hope in something that seemed impossible?"*

**In-A-Pinch: Tuesday, February 14:** Union Church will be preparing the meal for the **In-A-Pinch** non-food essentials pantry and we are in need of bakers. There will be a sign-up sheet in the vestibule. Thank you!



**Lenten Book Discussion:** Lent begins Wednesday, March 1<sup>st</sup>. I've ordered several copies of *The Prophet in You: Gifts for Prophecy and Transformation* by Joan Chittister.

#### **Excerpt from the Introduction**

*The prophetic call is a call to the cutting edge of life. Prophets are those who look at life as it is and set out to expand it. They simply refuse to shrink a vision of tomorrow to the boundaries of yesterday...*

*During Lent this year I want to explore the Sunday Scriptures with you in light of the prophetic call asking: What does this call have to do with you? How will it affect your life? What will it mean to your own development and spiritual authenticity? As we journey with Jesus from the desert to the empty tomb a clear picture of the kind of prophet needed for our time emerges. These Lenten readings offer seven prophetic gifts that can empower us and shape a new world: the gift of desert struggle, accepting the call, finding our passion, seeing anew, compassionate weeping, courageous witness, and faithful endurance.*

*We must never forget that the prophets—people like you and me—discouraged by the present, weary from trying, still chose to follow the magnet toward truth, lest it and their souls wither within them. Let us embrace that spiritual legacy and welcome “The Prophet in You.”*

—Joan Chittister

- I am organizing a weekly sharing group, guided by Chittister's publication, to meet at the Church Office on **Tuesdays, 1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m. beginning February 28<sup>th</sup>**. I will post the Sunday readings ahead of time. The reading in the booklet is only one page long. You are encouraged to read the Sunday scripture passage and the booklet page prior to coming. There will be a sign-up sheet in the vestibule for those who want to take part.
- The booklets will be available at church for those who prefer to either read and reflect on their own, or organize their own sharing group.

**Life Lessons Sundays:** Many of you told me this past Sunday how much you enjoyed the service and appreciate the Life Lessons Sundays. Perhaps you are willing to contribute to one. No doubt many of you have had injuries, surgeries, illnesses and loss from which you've recovered and on looking back, from which you've gained important insights. Please consider sharing your learnings with us to be used in the awakening, call to worship, closing blessing, song, writing for the bulletin, etc. We learn from each other in community.

February 26 - Lessons from Illness or injury – Sermon by Tom Bancroft

March 26 - Lessons from Loss – Sermon by Lisa Barstow



### **Notes from the Finance Committee**

As you probably noted from the materials sent out prior to the Semi-Annual Meeting last Sunday, or heard at some length in the presentations at the meeting, we ran a deficit in 2016 of about \$4500, and are projecting a budget deficit of over \$15,000 for 2017. Obviously, this is not happy news. We run a tight financial ship and are fairly conservative in the use of our dollars.

In our budget discussion on Sunday, we talked as a congregation about the three areas where most of our income goes: Pastor salary, music ministry, and keeping the physical church in good condition. We agreed that maintaining excellence in our ministries, pastoral or music, is essential for the life of our church, and that skimping in any of these areas could in fact harm our church's long term health.

Luckily, our current underlying financial position is good, and we can absorb these losses in the short term. However, if we were to project similar deficits just a short way into the future, it quickly becomes apparent that this pattern is not sustainable. We do believe that this is a short term problem that can be explained and that can be fixed. First, this is an unusual time in the recent history of the church. It is our first year after Pastor Jan's retirement, and there may well have been a softening of financial support as a result. Nancy has done a terrific job as our interim, and we firmly believe that this is not a reflection on her or on her ministry. As always, a few folks do unfortunately choose to leave the church in any given year, but we have also had new members welcomed into our fold in the past two succeeding Sundays. But the fact remains that Jan's years as our Pastor were extraordinary, and it is understandable that there was some letdown following her retirement.

The second reason is a bit more difficult. Almost all our budgeting is based on pledge responses, and pledges for 2017 are down a bit. Our Church has always been very reluctant to ask for money more than once. However, when only 46 pledges come in from the 120+ members and friends who receive the pledge letter, it is a problem for us. This is not necessarily new, but as our church has grown it has become more and more of a problem, and frankly, harder to reconcile given the level of enthusiasm, love, and support that is manifest in our church. When this issue was brought forth at the meeting on Sunday, many in the congregation were incredulous, and some promised to increase their pledges on the spot. We know that many do all they can for Union Church, in terms of both time and treasure, and we truly and deeply appreciate that. However, we personally know that our family can do more, and Eve and I have pledged to ourselves that we will do so. Just a little bit more from a lot of folks can go a long way toward solving this problem. On top of that, if some of our members and friends who overlooked their pledges up to this point were to send them in now, we could easily see our problem disappear altogether.

We are blessed by the faithful generosity of this congregation. Together, we will ensure that the treasures that are our church and our worship experience remain vibrant and inspiring in the way that IS Union Church.

## Winter Reflections

by *Deborah Burke*

I always pray  
when the cold comes  
that I might touch the soul of winter,  
even though I don't know  
what I'm really asking.

Winter is as sensual as summer  
but less raucous. I keep trying  
to taste it in a different way  
like you would sample flavors  
of ice cream, berries, trying  
to get to its major ingredient  
--that soft delicious quietness--  
at the center into which I want to sink  
like you would onto different mattresses in a  
store  
until you found just the right  
soft quietness, sink and breathe "ahhh."

I want to play foolishly  
in the woods like a child when the trees  
are so flocked with snow  
the whole place looks like a magical kingdom  
out of a fairytale.

I have to gasp. I have to stare. I have to hush.  
Winter is ever changing  
And I hunger to get to the bottom  
of its inexplicable lessons.

Take this week: I woke  
to the outside front windows cased in ice  
the back windows plastered with snowflakes  
And rivulets of rain on the side door.

I laughed. I'm of three minds too some days  
unsure of what I want, flummoxed  
a little crazed too. I worry that we might lose  
the magnificence of winter  
like we are losing the ice sheets.  
I think it's time to get a little  
crazed and "snow" Washington with  
every bit of fierceness we can muster.

Winter teaches that too--a fierceness  
nothing and no one can stand against.



Photo by Jenny Comeau

## Why Did God Invent Winter?

by Jennifer Comeau

Why did God invent winter? A season so unappealing that more than half our congregation exists stage right before it arrives. Think of it: biting 40 mph wind-gusts that cut through our flimsy coats (like those we endured on Friday); dangerous iced-up walkways and roads (like those we tottered on last week); muted, dull-brown, dead-looking landscape absent of vibrant flowers and buzzy-buzzing creatures; mushy, sloppy gray snow-piles that melt into – mud season!

Then God whispers, “Clean your smudged glasses, weary traveler, and look again. Over there, graceful conifers stand resplendent in their snow-laden ball gowns; snowflakes fall like silent miracles, and then land to form curls, like vanilla frosting upon the earth; breathtaking sunrises or sunsets, with brushstrokes of crimson, blaze-orange and dusty lavender intensify an undulating backdrop of white; oh, and the silence. The silence.”

Winter, yin to summer’s robust yang. That *pull inward* to a place of dormancy, hibernation, listening, and rest. Long dark nights foster sweet slumber and the dream-time, while galaxies of stars twinkle their consent; cozy fires radiate warmth through layers of t-shirts and turtlenecks, knitted sweaters and corduroys; intimate games – of canasta or euchre, pinochle or Oh Heck – brighten the hours while succulent aromas rise from the stew that cooks atop the stove; puffed-up chickadees and cardinals, nuthatches and finches carry on without pause while gusty onshore winds generate groans from poplars at wood’s edge.

Winter, a time when a deep view opens up into the wildwood; a view that at last allows us sojourners to see the forest through the trees.

We remember now. And so, slightly abashed, we say, “Thank you, God, for the gifts and splendors that only winter can provide.”

And then God chuckles, nods, and says, “Winter is all these things.” Then God urges, “Surrender, weary traveler; become like the dormant seed, that rests and waits; waits for a sweet invitation from a newly-warmed earth.”



Photo by Nancy Bancroft

## Lessons From Winter

By Chris Sorrentino

I have two lessons for the winter season:

1) To me, one of the finest things about the winter season is the lack of background noise ... the only thing you can hear often is the whistling of the wind ... so to me, one of the lessons of the season is the importance of listening, and an appreciation of silence

2) When I first moved to New England, i wasn't a big fan of winter, and anxiously awaited the melting of the snow so I could start playing tennis ... Then I realized that the wait for warmth could be a long wait indeed ... So I said, instead of waiting 5 months for it to get warm, maybe I should simply embrace winter for what it is ... so to me, the lesson of the season is that sometimes we have to embrace that which we don't at first enjoy, and try to appreciate the gifts of all the seasons





Photo by Jen Comeau

**Maine Council of Churches:** As most of you know, Union Church has become a member of the Maine Council of Churches. The Council’s Mission is as follows: “Rooted in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, our mission is to inspire congregations and persons of faith to unite in good works that build a culture of justice, compassion and peace.” Moderator Paul Schlaver appointed Tom Bancroft as Union Church’s representative and Tom has been elected as an “at large” member to the Council’s Board. This membership is timely indeed.

This week the Maine Council of Churches issued a press release joining its voice to the national outcry about the recent executive order banning refugees and immigrants from certain Muslim-majority countries. (see below.)

In addition, MCC is a signatory to the Interfaith Immigration Coalition petition that has gathered thousands of signatures from faith leaders and denominations around our country, including our member denominations.

**Press Release:**

Rev. Jane Field, Executive Director, Maine Council of Churches

January 30, 2017

The Maine Council of Churches, consisting of nine member denominations who represent more than 550 local congregations across our state, joins The Interfaith Immigration Coalition, a large and diverse national organization of faith groups and clergy, in condemning President Trump's executive order barring entry to refugees and immigrants from certain Muslim-majority countries.

The Council concurs with Rev. Steve Martin of the National Council of Churches, who has stated explicit condemnation for any religious test for refugees and immigrants, describing the order as an assault on religious freedom that will likely worsen the current spike in anti-Islam incidents nationwide. We decry derogatory language that has been used about refugees, immigrants, and our Muslim friends and neighbors. Inflammatory rhetoric has no place in our response to this humanitarian crisis.

War, conflict and persecution have forced innocent people to flee their homes in record numbers and become refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants. Maine Council of Churches Executive Director, Rev. Jane Field, says, "As people of faith, we are called by our sacred texts and traditions to love our neighbor, accompany the vulnerable, and welcome the stranger, regardless of their religion. Our faith compels us to pray that in our nation's discernment, compassion for the plight of refugees and immigrants will touch our leaders' hearts. And our faith compels us to act to ensure that our government chooses moral, just and compassionate policies."

The Maine Council of Churches affirms our country's rich history as a leader in refugee resettlement who maintains the most rigorous refugee screening process in the world, involving the Departments of Defense, State, and Homeland Security, the FBI, and the National Counter-Terrorism Center conducting biometric checks, medical screenings, forensic testing of documents, DNA testing for family reunification cases, and in-person interviews with highly trained homeland security officials. We ask our elected officials to recognize that new Americans of all faiths and backgrounds contribute to our economy, our community, and our congregations. They are powerful ambassadors of the American Dream and our nation's founding principles of equal opportunity, religious freedom, and liberty and justice for all.

The Maine Council of Churches believes that proposals to disqualify refugees and immigrants based solely on their nationality or religion fly in the face of the very principles this nation was built upon, contradict the legacy of leadership our country has historically demonstrated, and dishonor our shared humanity.

**Save the Dates:**

- February 28<sup>th</sup>, Mardi Gras celebration at the Community Club. 6:00 p.m. social, 6:30 p.m. dinner. Details to follow.

- March 1<sup>st</sup>, Ash Wednesday Vesper Service. 7:00 p.m.

### **Retreats at Marie Joseph Spiritual Center**

#### **One-Day Retreat ~ Wednesday, March 15, 2017 ~ A Time to Listen, Engage, Nurture and Thank ~ 10:00 AM – 3:30 PM w/ Diane Dube**

Do you want to live something truly meaningful this Lent? Join us as we take a new slant on our traditional Lenten disciplines of prayer, penance and almsgiving. Come enhance your understanding of these time-tested *practices* by viewing them as invitations to *Listen, Engage, Nurture and Thank*. See how this perspective can lead to deeper relationships with self, others and God, truly enriching this season of spiritual transformation.

Cost: \$45.00 includes hot meal.

#### **March 10 – 12, 2017 ~ An Introductory Workshop / Retreat on Centering Prayer**

w/ Fr. Joseph Manship

Do you feel pulled in all directions? Do you want more from your prayer life? Do you hunger for a deeper, personal relationship with God? Do you simply want to review your existing practice of Centering Prayer? Centering Prayer is a simple method of Christ-centered, silent prayer; a renewal of an ancient Christian contemplative practice, updated for our time. It can lead to a deeper prayer life, personal healing, spiritual transformation and closer union with God. Cost: \$200.00

#### **March 24 – 26, 2017 ~ Watercolor with Mandalas**

w/ Mary Rich

This weekend will be about the use of watercolors and mandalas as a means to help identify our woundedness and to create a path to healing. In the process, we will learn many watercolor techniques. You do not have to be an artist to benefit from this retreat. Cost: \$200.00

#### **March 31 – April 2, 2017 ~ Praying with Icons: Behold the Beauty of the Lord**

w/ Steve Bonian, S.J.

Icons have been objects of faith, controversy and fascination for centuries. The popularity of icons, which are a rich resource for prayer, continues to this day. Praying with icons is an intuitive art gained with practice and experience. This retreat will consist of meditations on specific icons, each of which will be paired with scriptural passages.

Cost: \$200.00

**April 21 – 23, 2017 ~ Women in Scripture / Touched by Christ**

w/ Aline Plante, PM and Ann Boyle, RSR

Our focus will be on the stories of four biblical women: Mary Magdalene, the Samaritan woman at the well, the woman who touched Jesus' garment, and the woman caught in adultery. We shall see how their lives were radically transformed when Jesus healed them and gave them a new purpose in life.

Here, we will ponder His question, **"What do you want Me to do for you?"** Cost: \$200.00

**One-Day Retreat ~ Wednesday, April 26, 2017 ~ Blessing / The Power of Recognizing God's Goodness!**

10:00 – 3:30 PM w/ Diane Dube.

*God is Good! God is Great! Let us thank God for our food! Amen.* We are familiar with this simple table blessing. Yet, food is only one way that God favors us on a daily basis. What if we could recognize so many other ways God has poured out goodness upon our lives? Sometimes, our blessings are hidden in suffering and pain. Through sharing, quiet reflection and prayer, we will discover how God demonstrates protection, assistance and favor throughout our lives.

Cost: \$45.00

**April 28 – 30, 2017 ~ Praying with Hearts and Hands**

w/ Connie Bartelson and Marsha Hafferty

Join the Holy Knitters Prayer-Shawl Ministry as we joyfully share in the care of God's people by using the gifts of our hands to knit or crochet sacred prayer shawls. Our prayers and blessings are woven into the shawls as our hands work to fashion them. Shawls are then given to people for comfort, healing or in celebration. Basic knitting or crocheting skills are a prerequisite for this retreat. Cost: \$200.00

FMI and to register, call 207-284-5671 or, visit [www.mariejosephspiritual.org](http://www.mariejosephspiritual.org)