

A weekly collection of news, reflections and announcements from the  
Congregational Church of West Medford  
an Open and Affirming Congregation of the United Church of Christ



## PASTORAL REFLECTION

### Ordinary People and An Ordinary Mess

There is something pretty cool about Matthew's treatment of the birth of Jesus (Lectionary Year A). For one thing, in this day and age of sound bites and very short attention spans, Matthew's version is wicked succinct, so you could say he communicates in much the same way as we do these days. This is all he really says about the actual birth: (1:18a) "*Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way...*" and (1:25) [*Joseph*] *had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus*. But in between, Matthew tells quite a story to which we ordinary folk can relate!



Luke's version of the birth of Jesus captures our imaginations with angels and stars and shepherds and mangers and the rest of the magical mystery we so lovingly present in pageants and carols. But Matthew's version catches the sharp edges of our broken hearts with the messy-relationship-stuff and emotional paradox in which plain old, ordinary Joseph finds himself. In between verses 18a and 25, Matthew presents us with the kind of real life drama and turmoil we all know when faced with disappointments, family conflicts and our very-own-bruised-egos.

Here's the thing. Based on the culture of the day, Joseph had already entered into the contract of marriage and he was betrayed by his now-pregnant betrothed. It would have been normal that a betrayal as significant as this would lead a person to walk away. In fact the law called for either public stoning to the death or divorce so Matthew. Given the context, few of us could not empathize with Joseph's choice to cut his losses and quietly divorce Mary.

It would also have been normal for everyone involved to have been pretty freaked-out. Talk about some serious holiday stress...betrothed, betrayal, pregnancy, punishment, divorce, loss, census, angels, crazy dreams—yowzaa! You know what they say about family and the holidays. Are you feeling it yet...shopping lists, baking, wrapping, decorating, visitors, office parties, school concerts, kids clamoring, snow storms, shoveling, sitting in traffic, multiple church commitments, the Christmas blues, wishing it was all over and hearing from the pastor to look to the stars and hold a baby!? Yeah, if we

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stop to think about it, we can identify with Joseph's many-faceted, real life, messy, ordinary people kind of challenges.

And then, with Joseph poised to react in an ordinary fashion, the Holy Spirit intervenes in a dream and shows Joseph

another way (this seems to be a pattern with God, right?), another reaction, another not-so-normal response. I wonder if we might be so moved?

David Lose, who you have heard me quote before, reflects this week on his blog that, "Because Mary and Joseph aren't merely characters from a stained-glass window, but flesh and blood people...we can imagine them as people *like us* -- with ups and downs to their relationships, for instance."

And the more we might imagine ourselves to be people *like them* - the easier it is for us to imagine ourselves also being used by God to accomplish God's purposes despite our ordinary-ness and the messiness of our lives and our relationships.

Jesus' birth "was just a birth, like millions of others, unremarkable in every possible way. Which is, once again, the point. Jesus came as one of us. Jesus was born like we are, lived as we live, loved and laughed and suffered as we do. And died as we will die. And on the third day, God raised him from the dead, that we might no longer live in fear of death."

In his rendition of the story, "Matthew paints a picture of the utter *normalcy* of the holy family. Which means, of course, he tells us about the complexity, the confusion, and the frailty that attended this family, just like every other family. Indeed, there is nothing exceptional about this couple or birth ... except that God works through it to save, to draw near to us in love, grace, and salvation."

Beloved, as Christmas arrives in your heart, may you know how extraordinary a moment that is in your ordinarily messy life and may you see (even if only in a dream) how God might work through you to accomplish God's purpose.

With blessing and prayer, Rev. Wendy Miller Olapade  
revwdmiller@comcast.net/617.592.5853

### Living the Season of Advent December 22: Matthew 1:18-25

As Advent draws to a close, we focus on the birth of Jesus. Joseph's role in the birth and life of Jesus is often speculated, but one thing is sure – he trusted God's will and stood by Mary during a difficult time in her life.

Joseph provides a home and family for Jesus, an example that all of us can learn from today. And Joseph's trust in God's message from a dream shows us how God can communicate with us and give us direction and guidance.

As we welcome our Saviour into the world, may we also welcome God's guidance in our lives.

**This week as your to-do list grows longer in the lead-up to Christmas, pause for 10 minutes each day to read the focus scripture and think of the ways God is present in your life and even in your dreams.**



## IN OUR PRAYERS AND PASTORAL CARE



### In Our Prayers

Concerns: We pray for Brenda recovering from minor procedure; Rev. Wendy's broken arm; Louise's neighbor, Danny's sister died; Newtown, CT remembrances; another school shooting and it is scary going to school; Joy's friend Sheila having cancer surgery; Bruce's Brother, Bill, accepting treatment in Texas; Marsha prays that God will lead the people and use of our building; Gail's brother Andrew in Afghanistan; all of our military serving away from home; our sexton Steve's daughter and grandson; Diane's mother Anne; June L. recovering from treatment.

We continue to pray for Charlene & Rich's neighbor Joanne D. who passed away this week; Nelson Mandela, an amazing man who did so much for So. Africa and the world; Mary and Max Beal's great-grandson, George with cancer; for all with cancer; Deb S.'s brother in law, John, that he has a full recovery; Dick's friend, Ed, who is returning home from the hospital; those who find the holiday season challenging; a member of our community struggling with family matters.

Joys: We celebrate with our music ministry this past week; thank God for the gift Susan Corso brought to our church the past few weeks; celebrate with Ose for her birthday; Stephanie's brother and sister-in-law are having a baby girl; our college kids coming home, Kylie. Clarisse and Alex; Jen's friend, Hope, coming home and they will spend time together; Louise's Christmas caroling; Rev. Wendy's 26th anniversary of sobriety, Julie and Paul's travels; Deb S. and family as they travel to Switzerland; for all the support from the congregation for our Pine Ridge craft fair and HOKA! Coffee drive; Alex's New Year's Eve DJ gig.

We continue to pray for Ernestine S. in rehab and Dick S. as they face the future; Thelma as she settles into being at home; we pray for our church's ongoing process of discernment and for the leaders who are guiding our conversations and discovery. We pray for all the MACUCC churches engaged in Crossroads.

We continue to pray for all those struggling with cancer and addiction; all those dealing with Alzheimer's disease; for the environment; for President Obama and Congress regarding our present times of strife—may God's intentions prevail as they make decisions; for Lorna S. still hopeful for full recovery; Eva W. recovering at home. We remember fallen soldiers and Veterans and those serving in our military. We lift up all of the children of our congregation and those we bless in Bright Stars. ***Please send prayer requests to [office@medfordchurch.org](mailto:office@medfordchurch.org) by noon each Wednesday.***

### Pastoral Care Concerns

The "Deacon of the Month" for December is Joy Harris who can be reached at ([brujoy2@comcast.net](mailto:brujoy2@comcast.net)). Please let the deacon of the month know if there is someone who could use a visit, phone call, card, or prayer. The Deacons (aka: Spiritual Life) rely on your input about the well being and needs of our members and friends.

## OUR CHURCH ANNOUNCEMENTS

pennies  
from  
heaven



### Empty your Pockets in the Pennies from Heaven Jar:

The "Pennies from Heaven Jar" will be in the Narthex for you to empty your pockets of the loose change you may have. This jar is just one way to help support the church in a very easy way. The jar easily takes coins and paper money.

### Happy December Birthdays

Janice Willson	December 7
Timothy Roche	December 13
Ose Manheim	
Joyce Henson	December 15
Melanie Whittington	December 28
Tom Campbell	December 29

*For your December Birthday*



**Altar Flowers Always Welcomed:** Please contact Brenda Briggs [bgbriggs51@gmail.com](mailto:bgbriggs51@gmail.com) (or the church office@medfordchurch.org) to make arrangements to schedule a Sunday to bring flowers or order them in honor or memory of a loved one.

**Fellowship Café:** During the month of December, Building and Grounds and Stewardship Committees are sponsoring coffee hour with the help of the children of the Sunday School and all of you are invited to bring treats to share! Big thanks to Karen McCune Barca who has taken on the responsibility of setting up and cleaning up the coffee weekly!! ***If you can bring some goodies or veggies or fruit to support, they would be very much welcomed.***

**Worship Volunteers Always Welcome:** We are always looking for folk to participate in worship as ushers and readers. Youth and Children are always welcomed to participate. The Spiritual Life Committee recruits readers. Kathy Williams is the contact at this time. ([kathypricewilliams@yahoo.com](mailto:kathypricewilliams@yahoo.com))



If you would like to usher, please see Rev. Wendy to find out more or ask any questions. You are also welcome to call the church office to volunteer. Our church works better when we all pitch in and participate! Your help is appreciated.



**Surprise! Your Pledge is Always Welcome:** Thanks to everyone who made last week's Thanksgiving and Pledge Sunday such a grand success. We worshipped and sang and blessed our commitments to each other and our ministry. Your pledge cards are always welcome. Just put them in the offering plate or get them to the Treasurer via the church office.

## MISSION AND OUTREACH

**Outreach Leadership Needed:** As 2013 draws to a close, the members of Outreach are being called to other ministries as we come to the end of our terms on the committee. We have loved serving as your Outreach Committee, and are grateful for the ways we have been transformed by serving you and serving our wider community. Given the uncertainty of how things will be organized in our faith community, we're hoping to ensure "project-based-leadership" for two of our long-term ministries - the Indigo House (Medford) and the Outdoor Church, Cambridge. We hope you'll pray about whether you feel called to be a leader in either of these ministries. If you're interested, or have questions, please be in touch with Jenna, by replying to this email. Blessings, Charlene, Susan & Jenna



**Thanks to all who have donated to the Angel Tree thus far!!**

**The Angel Tree:** This beloved annual tradition is an opportunity to share God's abundance with others. Most of the opportunities for giving to the local families have been distributed and need to be delivered this week—but we are inviting folk to purchase \$ 25.00 GROCERY STORE CARDS , for Rev. Wendy to give to folk who come to the church seeking help. If you would like to make a donation to that ministry,

please see Rev. Wendy or a member of outreach.

### **Sunday, December 29 - Making Sandwiches for Outdoor Church of Cambridge**

**We are looking for a volunteer to lead the sandwich-making.** This involves purchasing the ingredients (for which you'll be reimbursed), rounding people up to make sandwiches on the day of, and delivering them to a church in Cambridge. Please email Jenna ASAP, by replying to this email, if you are able to help. If you aren't interested in leading, we of course also need help spreading tuna, bagging sandwiches, etc. as always. Many hands make light work! [www.theoutdoorchurch.org](http://www.theoutdoorchurch.org)

### **An Advent reflection: thank you**

**Thank you for extending  
an extravagant welcome;**

**Thank you for changing lives  
through your bold and courageous witness;**

**Thank you for listening  
to our still speaking God.**



*From your partners in ministry on the staff  
of the Massachusetts Conference, United Church of Christ*



## FROM OUR FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS

*This holiday, give something  
that means something.*

Give blood and you could help save up to three lives.

### Medford Community Blood Drive

Sponsored by Medford City Hall

Monday, December 30, 2013

9:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Medford City Hall

Howard Alden Council Chambers

85 George P. Hassett Drive, Medford

For an appointment please call 1-800 RED CROSS  
(733-2767) or visit [redcrossblood.org](http://redcrossblood.org)

As an added incentive during the Winter Holidays,  
all presenting donors between 12/24 and 1/3 will receive a  
**commemorative long-sleeved American Red Cross t-shirt!**

Prizes are not redeemable for cash and non-transferable.



**American Red Cross**

Visit [redcrossblood.org](http://redcrossblood.org) or call **1-800-RED CROSS**  
today to schedule an appointment.

Individuals who are 17 years of age (16 with parental permission in some states), meet weight and height requirements (110 pounds or more, depending on their height), and are in generally good health may be eligible to donate blood. Please bring your Red Cross blood donor card or other form of positive ID when you come to donate. © The American National Red Cross 2013 | APLORS 2200

## UNITED CHURCH MISSION—A FINANCIAL ESPRESSION OF COVENANT IN THE UCC

***A New Way to Fund the Ministries of the United Church of Christ:*** After thorough study, much prayer and countless conversations, including a forum at Annual Meeting 2012 and focus groups with leaders from 20 churches, the Finance Committee of the Board of Directors has reached a preliminary conclusion that the future of the United Church of Christ in Massachusetts would be best served by a new way for our churches to fund our common mission. The new system is envisioned to have the following benefits: 1) It is based on percentage giving. This is biblical, and fair to churches of all sizes and socio-economic make-ups; 2) It is simple and easy to understand, because it mirrors the message we give to our members to give proportionally; 3) It invites generosity; 4) It allows all settings of the church to rise or decline together. If Conference and national ministries are effective in nurturing vitality and generosity in the local church, increased giving to the wider church would be one result; 5) All giving to and in the church is affirmed as mission giving; 6) It maintains a reasonable minimum expectation, with allowance for hardship situations.

### **Proposal:**

- Replace the current combination of membership-based Fellowship Dues and OCWM Basic Support with giving to United Church Mission based on a percentage of pledges and offerings received by the local church.
- Ask Congregations to calculate what percentage of their pledges and offerings they are currently giving in combined Dues and OCWM, and to commit to maintain that percentage.
- Invite churches to consider increasing this percentage gradually over time, as they are able.
- Establish a minimum covenantal requirement. In order for this new system to adequately replace both Dues and Basic Support, we need to maintain the expectation that every church will contribute.
- The same overall sharing ratio with the national church would be maintained and set annual by the Conference Annual Meeting.

It will be important for churches to maintain their current percentage of giving.

Note: Findings from our conversations include the following observations:

1. The membership model of Fellowship Dues is outdated . It fails to reflect the health of many of our churches, and will not adequately sustain the ministries of the wider church in the future
2. Any new system must be simple, and easy to understand and accept by any lay person of any or no church background
3. It is good to encourage generous and increased giving
4. Any model must allow for great variations within local church budgeting practices
5. Adopting a new model is contingent upon a commitment by local churches to maintain current levels of support.

Because the work of the church in all settings is to manifest God's love and justice, all church giving at every level is mission giving. This is true of Christian education in the local church, search and call services provided by the Conference, and disaster response at the national level, to list just a few examples. For More, including video explanation: <http://www.macucc.org/pages/detail/2644>

## NEWS AND EVENTS FROM THE UCC



**Merry Christmas**  
All are welcome in God's house.

### **The United Church of Christ**

Drawn together by the Holy Spirit, we are a distinct and diverse community of Christians that come together as one church, joining faith and action. In covenant with the church in all of its settings, we serve God in the co-creation of a just and sustainable world as made manifest in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

“That they may all be one.” —John 17:21

