

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



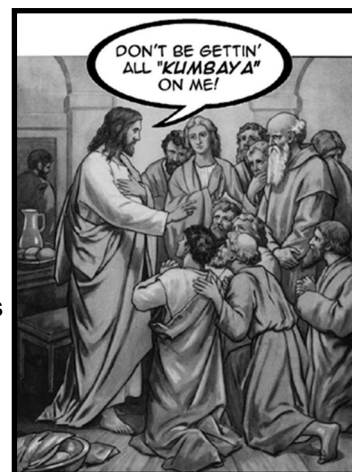
PASTORAL REFLECTION

"Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." Immediately they left their nets and followed him....Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.—Matthew 4:19b-20, 23

Entertaining Atheists Unawares?

Following a series of interviews with people who have become atheists *The Atlantic* magazine reports (June 2013) that most people become atheists *after spending time in church—primarily because they are not hearing a strong message of spiritual transformation.*

According to this article, and the atheists the author interviewed, people are looking for a more serious and vital version of Christianity—not a mushy mix of ceremony, handholding and kumbaya. So what can atheists teach us to help us create a stronger faith community? Well for starters they suggest *we need to be clear about the Christian mission and message*—and Jesus shows us how. In the gospel text for this week, as Jesus begins to call his disciples, we hear the word 'repent' again, only this time Jesus is saying it! He is inviting people to "turn around" and follow him and discover the amazing and unexpected closeness of God's Way (the Kingdom of Heaven). Jesus was crystal clear about his mission and his message. He sees his mission as a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah, so he moves to Capernaum by the sea so that the people sitting in darkness can see a great light. He begins his ministry with a focus on replacing the shadow of death with the light of life.



And don't we all need this light today!? The darkness of despair still needs to be replaced by the light of love and clarity; ignorance needs to be enlightened by insight; addiction must be overcome by self-control; illness overpowered by healing; isolation eliminated by community. Each of us has dark corners in our lives--places where we feel hopeless, sinful, lost, overwhelmed and alone. But when the great light of Christ begins to shine, we move from darkness into a new day.

But are we church folk, we who claim to be followers of Jesus, clear about Jesus' mission and message? "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). In our zeal to be progressive (open, welcoming, relevant) and not like "Those Christians", we soft peddle the Jesus factor for fear folk will be offended, or think we are representing

Continued on next page

the religious right. Rather than focusing on the light, we push social justice, community involvement, and "being good." These are important and good things for us to be doing—but divorced from Jesus as the light of the world, they don't shed light on the darkness.

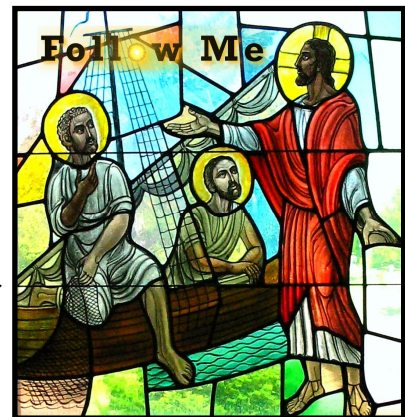
Atheists remind us to keep Christ closely connected to real life. A college student named Stephanie said of her church experience, "The connection between Jesus and a person's life was not clear." We've got to make a strong link between the life we live today and the life of Jesus. We all struggle with sin and Jesus' forgiveness. We all wander in confusion and need Jesus' clarity. We all take actions grounded in ignorance -- as individuals and communities -- and we all need Jesus' insights. It is our job as followers of Jesus to not only call for the correction of social ills, but to proclaim the teachings of Jesus the Christ, and help people connect that to their day to day lives.

Atheists teach us to offer thoughtful answers to life's difficult questions. When asked what they found unconvincing about the Christian faith, they spoke of hot-button issues such as evolution versus creationism, human sexuality and the reliability of the biblical text. Young people went to church hoping to find answers to these questions, as well as guidance about ethics, purpose and personal significance. What they found were services that were often shallow, harmless and irrelevant. As one student, said, "I really started to get bored with church." We need not shy away from offering solid answers to difficult questions, from evolution to human sexuality. Not if we want to stay connected to the thoughtful and serious-minded Christians all around us. We also need to *take the Bible seriously and invite people to follow Jesus*. Without exception, the former church-attenders expressed respect for Christians who embrace biblical teaching. They may not believe the words of the Bible themselves, but they admire people who are authentic and who act on their beliefs.

Jesus certainly did this when he called his first disciples along the banks of the Sea of Galilee. He sees two fishermen, and says to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." Jesus is bold enough to walk up to two complete strangers and challenge them to follow him in a life of discipleship. He cannot control their response, but he believes in what he is doing and is willing to act on his beliefs. They sense that he is so authentic and committed to his mission that they drop their nets and follow. And his word creates a new reality--discipleship. Jesus is consistent in word and deed. He teaches and preaches, and heals and his authenticity inspires people to follow him, and then his disciples recruit others to follow as well.

Unfortunately, we do not invite people to follow Jesus with this same enthusiasm. But why aren't we excited? Jesus' message and his mission are darned good stuff! Surely we can be clearer about the mission and message. Surely we can connect faith more closely to real life. Surely we can offer more thoughtful answers to life's difficult questions, take the Bible seriously and invite others to follow Jesus. The light of Christ has come into our lives, and it is our calling to share it with others. Jesus has called each of us to follow him, and to "fish for people." All we have to do is share our own story and tell them the good news (and make sure it is happening in church too)!

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



IN OUR PRAYERS AND PASTORAL CARE



Concerns: June L. who is facing Chemo treatment and a challenging prognosis; Kim G.'s sister-in-law's grandmother passed away; Ose's friend Wolfort and his wife, Alma dealing with terminal cancer diagnosis and Alzheimer's; Jeff S. getting some help. We pray for those affected the bombing in Afghanistan killing 3 US people and all those who are suffering in the midst of violence. We pray for students returning to college and all those affected by the extreme cold in North America.

Continued prayer for Bruce R.'s brother Bill in early recovery; for Bruce and Joy as they head to Florida to care for Joy's parents; Charlene C's brother Lou in the final stages of Alzheimer's; our sexton Steve's daughter and grandson; for all with cancer; Dick's friend, Ed, and his caregiver.

Joys: Bev R. celebrates Alli, Kris and Abbey holiday and safe trip coming home, Bev C. celebrates the privilege of can going out to dinner and not being afraid; Dick S. Ernestine's strengthening body and ability to come home; Charlotte celebrates Louise visiting older sister in NYC; Jeff S.'s birthday on 1/20; Deb S.'s Mom-in-laws 96th birthday; Kim G. son Jamie graduating from Medford Police Academy.

We continue to 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 by noon each Wednesday.***

Pastoral Care Concerns

The "Deacon of the Month" for January is Brenda Briggs who can be reached at (bgbriggs51@gmail.com). 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 January Birthdays

2	Julie Roberts
6	Alisha Saulnier
19	Tom Nackel
22	Grace Helen Kromm
24	Emma Louise Kromm



Altar Flowers Always Welcomed: Please contact Brenda Briggs 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 January the Outreach Ministries Committee is sponsoring coffee hour. 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. Robin Baker is the contact at this time (robin)

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.



Giving Offering Envelops: For all those who have made a 2014 pledge, your envelopes are ready and can be picked up after the service. They will be in Barnes Chapel at coffee hour.

Tax Documentation: If anyone would like a letter from the church to verify your pledge/contribution for 2013 tax purposes, please contact Tom Roche at thomasroche@comcast.net or call him at 781-281-1000.



Cleaning Our Closets—Literally!! Volunteers are needed for cleaning out the church closets: As we place the church building on the market and consider our future, Kathy Williams is leading this effort to “clean out our closets.” You would be amazed at how much stuff has accumulated and is stuck in corners. We will donate, trash, recycle as is called for. **Cleaning will take place weekly from 9:30-10 am before church and 11 am–noon after church until completed. Volunteers are particularly needed to drive boxes of unneeded items to charity donation sites.**

If you would like to join Kathy on this mission, please contact her at kathypricewilliams@yahoo.com.

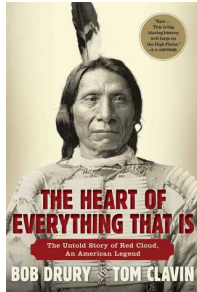
Cleaning our Closets—Figuratively: As our historian and as a part of the closet cleaning that is being done in connection with releasing our ministry from our building, Kathy Williams is considering that which should be saved for posterity and that which should be documented as part of our history. Medford Historical Society and Museum President, John Anderson, recently offered his expertise to examine and advise us regarding preservation and Kathy is in conversation with him in that regard. In response to Mr. Anderson’s offer, Kathy wrote this thoughtful and inspiring reflection that we wanted to share with everyone:

“You are right, we have a basement full of amazing documents, many of which I am sure have rich meaning in the history of Medford. Because we were picked by the Medford Historical Society (MHS) to present a talk on our history a couple of years ago, we had the opportunity to drag it all out of the (very dangerous) basement and look it over at least.

I greatly appreciate your offer of assistance. In a couple of weeks we are planning to begin that process of organizing, evaluating and finding homes for everything that is worth saving. We are hopeful that we can donate our materials to the Congregational Library (see www.congregationallibrary.org) as we believe that we are eligible to do so. We would gladly also donate documents and/or information, as they are desired, to the MHS and would love to arrange a time to meet with you, show you what we have and discuss this further. Any advice you can give us in this process would be greatly appreciated.

It is a sobering experience to make these huge changes to our church. Times change and we are trying to not be sad about this. We will still exist, but in a lighter and more appropriate form. We are planning to reinvent ourselves to be the church that is needed in the world today, not the church that was needed in 1872. To that end, we are hitting the road, getting mud on our boots in our efforts to do the work of Jesus Christ, tending to the poor, healing the sick, visiting the prisoners, caring for all. It is very easy to sit in our beautiful and comfortable large stone building and let our bank account dwindle and we are both proud and scared of our decision, your prayers would be greatly appreciated.”

MISSION AND OUTREACH



Sunday, March 09, 11:30—2:00 pm: Book Discussion: “The Heart of Everything That Is” Susan D’Arcy will lead this first book in book series/ discussion group. “The Heart of Everything That Is” is written by Bob Drury and Tom Clavin – and tells the untold story of Lakota Sioux chief, Red Cloud. There are ten copies in local libraries or you are encouraged to purchase the book yourself. We are open to suggestions for other Indian themed books for future book discussion groups. Contact Kathy or Joy with suggestions or questions. (NOTE: Date change from March 2 to March 9 as of 1/15/13)

Heifer Farm Rutland: Pancakes at the Farm—Saturday, March 8

9:00 am to 1:00 pm

Tour the farm, visit the sugar shack, spend time with the animals and enjoy a hearty pancake breakfast with Heifer Farm maple syrup and sausages. Advanced reservations are required so please let Susan D’Arcy Fuller know if you’d like to attend by Feb 15th. We will arrange carpooling once we know how many are going. Adults \$12.00, Children (3-10) \$6.00, free for Children under 3

Note this replaces the Heifer trip postponed due to weather.



FROM OUR FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS

Hallmark Health VNA and Hospice: Chronic Pain Self-Management Program presented by Hallmark Health System and Mystic Valley Elder Services are sponsoring a Free Program on Chronic Pain Self-Management for six sessions on Wednesdays, beginning January 22, through February 26, from 9:30 am - noon at Saltonstall Building at 121 Riverside Ave in Medford (Edgerly Hall). The Program is a "must attend" for those who want to learn how to manage their chronic pain, leading to a more satisfying and fulfilling life. Open to adults of all ages who have a primary diagnosis of pain or care for someone who does. This program is free, however registration is required as space is limited. To register or for more information, call (781) 338-7823.

CALL TO THE CCWM ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING SUNDAY, JANUARY 26 10:00 AM IN WORSHIP

Pursuant to the provisions of Article VII, Section 2 of the By-Laws of the Church, the Annual Meeting is hereby called to be held Sunday, January 26, 2014.

The meeting will be held beginning at 10:00 am, as an act of worship, in the Sanctuary for the following purpose:



1. To share and update everyone on the discernment process and answer any questions about it, and the year going forward.
2. To receive reports from the officers, staff, committees, and organization of the church
3. To adopt and vote on an annual budget
4. To elect officers and committee members
5. To vote on an amendment to our by-laws to permit remote electronic participation and voting in congregational meetings.

The contents of this warrant shall constitute the legal business of this meeting.

Posted January 15, 2013

CROSSROADS PHASE II

As you will hear in our Congregational Meeting today, January 26, 2014—we will return to the discernment work of Crossroads—with an experiential process of Prayer, Study, Exploration and Experimentation—all designed to bring us to our bold decision about the future of our faith community. We will call this time Crossroads Phase II. You will hear more specifics about this in our meeting today including:

- **Prayer for our Process:** beginning Feb 2, each Sunday from 9:15 — 9:30 am, Rev. Wendy will lead a time of prayer in Bean Chapel for our discernment process
- **Wednesday Worship and Study: Being Jesus Followers:** beginning Feb 5, 7:00 pm — 8:00 pm, Rev. Wendy will lead a weekly worship, study and dialogue designed to consider what Jesus asked of us when he said, "Follow me," and what that suggests to us about what God is calling us into for the future.
- **Experimentation:** We will deliberately experiment in worship. We will share more about this as it unfolds. Some of this has begun to happen already but we are excited to try other new things.
- **Exploration:** We will bring 15 minutes of exploration via video, web sites, and other means to you—offering successful ministries and unique models for worship and community designed to

Continued on next page

spark ideas and creativity in us—this will occur each Sunday after worship during fellowship hour. One thing that will happen during this time is the exploration of worship, ministry and faith communities that are doing a new thing and thriving! We intend to expose ourselves to lots of new ideas in the interest of getting our own creative juices flowing.

This past Sunday, a couple of our leaders took a field trip to two different churches and here is a bit of what they experienced at Grace Church UCC in Framingham and Hope Central Church in Jamaica Plain, as reported by Kathy Williams. The purpose of our visits was to observe churches doing things in new and interesting ways. We plan to make more visits and welcome anyone to join us. If you are interested please let Kathy Williams or a member of the leadership team know.

Grace Church, Framingham: This church is in the Crossroads program with us. Like us, they owned a big old building and decided to sell it to their tenant, a growing Brazilian congregation. They are now worshipping in a house which they have turned into a church. We found their service to be fairly traditional (New Century Hymnal, prayers, readings, sermon, prayers of the people). The pastor, Rev. Bradford Watters was dynamic and engaging. The service was quite participatory and parts were handed out immediately prior to the service (I even had a reading). There were about 25 in worship, the snow prevented some, but they are a small group. There was a Sunday School (mostly teens) but it does not meet every Sunday. They are making little or no efforts to grow. They people were friendly to us (esp the people we knew already in Crossroads). The house-as-church model was pretty nice for a small group. They had done some renovations to make the building fit their needs but not much decoration. They do some mission work and the Faith in Action Team met after church. They pay the pastor full time, they pay a music director, but have no administrator. They said that they don't think this will be permanent; at this time they are considering a relationship of some sort with another UCC church in town. We promised to stay in touch. Julie Roberts added: Grace in Framingham gave me an idea about how a small (our size) congregation could feel (more cozy and casual than in our big sanctuary) meeting in a small church (not much room, though, if they want to grow).

Hope Central Church, Jamaica Plain: We have strong ties with this congregation, through Rev. Wendy, Steven and Nanette, Jean Vandergrift. We attended their 5:30 PM service. Their pastor, Rev. Laura Ruth Jarrett, is also familiar to us, when she was working at First Church Somerville she preached at our church and spoke about the ONA process. Like Grace, the service at Hope is both traditional and not. There is a jazz trio for music and there was a small (4 member) choir. Julie thought the music was a little snoozy but I loved it. In fact, I loved everything about this church. Much of their language and traditions are things that Steven and Wendy both have brought to us, so I felt at home. Laura Ruth is warm and wonderful. In fact, the whole congregation embraced us. There were about 50-60 or so people in worship, there would have been more except it was in direct conflict with the Patriots game. There was a baby dedication and of course communion (that Disciples communion every week thing). Its hard to say what I loved about it so much, you need to go there yourself and feel it. We promised them that we would be back. Julie added: I enjoyed the quiet but energized atmosphere of the evening service at Hope Central, people very welcoming, and several mentioned our mutual connections. with Wendy, Steven and Jean, esp. how helpful Wendy was in guiding their changes to becoming "Hope Central". I definitely want to attend one of their Taize services (second Tuesday of each month).