

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

So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed, and wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba. When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot; for she said, "Do not let me look on the death of the child." And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar?

Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. —Genesis 21:14-18

God Hears, God Cares



This hard to hear story, which one commentator suggested we might call "Ishmael's Sacrifice," often gets short shrift given that it falls between the miraculous pregnancy/birth of aged Abraham and silly Sarah's nation-founding-son, Isaac and the horrifying-but-of-told-test-of-faith-in-that same son's-near-sacrifice. The Hagar/Ishmael story is hard to hear because it is inconsistent with our understanding of an all welcoming, everybody-is-equal, unconditionally loving God. Here is Sarah, the very mother of God's chosen people acting like a whiney school girl—jealous, judge-y, cranky—and afraid that someone else's good stuff will somehow spoil it for her and her child. Sheesh. Not very attractive for a person of faith, huh? It makes you wonder what was up with Abraham that he couldn't call her on her self-centered smallness. Maybe her post-partum depression was overwhelming both of them... and seriously, why wouldn't God expect more of her? But that is reflection for another day.

What is pretty powerful about this, Hagar and Ishmael's story (and of course, what is usually powerful about every story) is the way God reacts. Hagar is literally visited (for the second time in her life) by God (or an angel of God—the difference is kind of murky) who says what angels always say, "Do not be afraid."

In the Hebrew version of the text the syllables for the name "Ishmael" are used and are translated "God heard". It is the only time in the whole story that Ishmael's name appears, as if to emphasize the

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meaning of the name--God hears. God hears the cries of the outcast and abandoned. God hears and has compassion "and God was with the boy" (21:20). God is with the boy, this outcast son of Abraham. God is with his mother, too, an Egyptian slave woman cast out by the father of her child.

God hears and God cares and God will take action to help and guide you...*Do not be afraid, though things seem hopeless. Take the child in your arms. I have heard his cries. I will save him and will make of him a great nation. Do not be afraid, I will show you the water you need. Do not be afraid, you have been judged and sent out from your home, but I am here, I am with you and I care. Do not be afraid, for once again, I am showing myself to you—the outcast and oppressed. Do not be afraid, "Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him."*

And as the story goes, "God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow. He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt." And he did become a great nation. As one commentator suggested, Ishmael was not in the covenant made with the chosen people (the idea of election is part of what makes this text so hard for us) but he was part of a promise that preceded and was larger than that covenant. The old hymn reminds us, "There's a wideness in God's mercy like the wideness of the sea."

The good news? We cannot limit God's mercy. God hears the cry of the abandoned. God hears the cry of the outcast, and God cares and God saves. May it be so for each of us every time, like Sarah, we are jealous, judge-y, crabby and small. May it be so for each of us every time, like Hagar, we are cast out or left behind or on the outs with someone we love. May it be so for each of us every time, like me, we fail

to love the way God wants us to love, fail to put others ahead of ourselves, or just fumble and fall. May it be so that every time—we know that God hears and God cares.

Rev. Wendy Miller Olapade

revwdmiller@comcast.net

617.592.5853



IN OUR PRAYERS AND PASTORAL CARE



Concerns: We continue to pray for Louise's teacher and teacher's daughter who died within months of each other; Phil M. for healing from cancer; Ernestine S. and her family as she transitions to nursing care; a member of Karen's family; the many emotions we are experiencing as a congregation as we move forward with our bold decision; light and love to prevail in a broken situation; a hurt soul who is lashing out; a friend of Joy's, a coworker who passed away; all affected by gun violence in our country—including the perpetrators; for June L. for strength, courage and recovery; for

Kim G. and her family for strength for the challenge of caring for June. We continue to pray for Thelma T. recuperating at Aberjona; for Ernestine at Winchester Nursing; for Eva W. at home; Kathy W. in her prison work; for our sexton Steve S. caring for his father and grandson; patience for all who are working so hard on our transition; for God to make a way for reconciliation where there seems to be no way; for beloved friends who are not with us; all who struggle with addictions; our continued discernment about worship and our new ministry; Tom C. for relief from chronic neck pain; Sheila in treatment; a brother Paul and his wife's struggles; those caring for the elderly; Dick S's friend Ed.

Joys: We celebrate the MACUCC Annual Meeting, the installations of Kent French and Jason Donnelly to new ministries; the arrival of Molly's book; our future; all who are graduating and moving on; the courage with which we are facing the future and the hand God has had in it all.

We continue to pray for Charlene's family as they walk with her brother Lou who is in hospice care; all in recovery; for all those struggling with cancer, addiction and Alzheimer's; for the environment; for President Obama and Congress regarding our present times of strife—may God's intentions prevail as they make decisions; for our beloved elders at home: Eva W., June L., Thelma T., Tom C. We remember fallen soldiers, 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 requests to office@medfordchurch.org by noon Wed.***

Pastoral Care Concerns: The Deacon of the Month for June 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. Rev. Wendy can be reached: revwdmiller@comcast.net.

Fellowship Hour Help Needed: Can you bring some goodies to support our fellowship time? Karen McCune Barca has take on the organization of this beloved time—and all are welcome to help. Please be in touch with her about signing up for a Sunday to bring snacks! Immediate help needed for summer Sundays. Please contact Karen (karenmccunebarca@gmail.com).

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. Ose Manheim and Julie Roberts are the contacts at this time. You are also welcome to call the church office to volunteer.

OUR CHURCH ANNOUNCEMENTS

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.

Happy June Birthdays

- 2 Gregory Cox
- 2 Kylie Baker
- 8 Jack Briggs
- 9 Rebecca Adriana Luongo
- 10 Karen McCune Barca
- 11 Peggy Bennett
- 11 James Lee Grubb, III
- 15 Chris and Philip DiSciullo
- 19 David Luongo
- 21 June Livingston
- 28 Constance Wescott
- 29 Jessica Coughlin



Please Note These Important Summer Changes

Summer Church Council Date Changed To:

- Fourth Wednesday, June 25 – 7 pm
- Third Wednesday, July 16 – 7 pm
- Fourth Wednesday, August 27 – 7 pm

Summer Staff Vacation

- Diane Petrelis will be out of the office for the first three weeks of July. (July 1 through July 18).
- Herman Weiss will be off from Sunday Worship on July 11, 20 and 27.
- Rev. Wendy will be on vacation July 1—7; July 20—August 4; at a conference August 7—10 and off Sunday, August 31.

Volunteers Needed for Office Support—office will be closed Mon. & Fri. in July—can you help? Diane will be available by phone and email during the three weeks she is away.

Tues, July 1; Wed, July 2; Thur, July 3.

Tues, July 8; Wed, July 9, Thurs, July 10.

Tues, July 15; Wed, July 16, Thurs, July 17



MISSION AND OUTREACH



The Lakota Sewing Circle in So. Dakota has donated a Star Quilt for us to raffle. The purpose of the raffle is raise funds to cover the shipping costs of all the sewing materials generously given and to be sent to the Pine Ridge Fund.

Tickets are \$10 each or 3 for \$20. Please contact Joy Harris at brujoy2@comcast.net.

<https://www.facebook.com/LakotaSewingCircle> As well as
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aC64PK14pCc&list=UUcOHBWkJea6ssmyl_wk-5A&feature=share

Joy Harris is organizing a group to attend the Mashpee Wampanoag Pow Wow—either July 4th or July 5th. We will car-pool to the event.

Those interested please contact Joy at brujoy2@comcast.net.

Outdoor Church
Sandwich Making
Sunday, June 29

If you can help with transportation, please contact Elizabeth Bennett via reianfans@yahoo.com



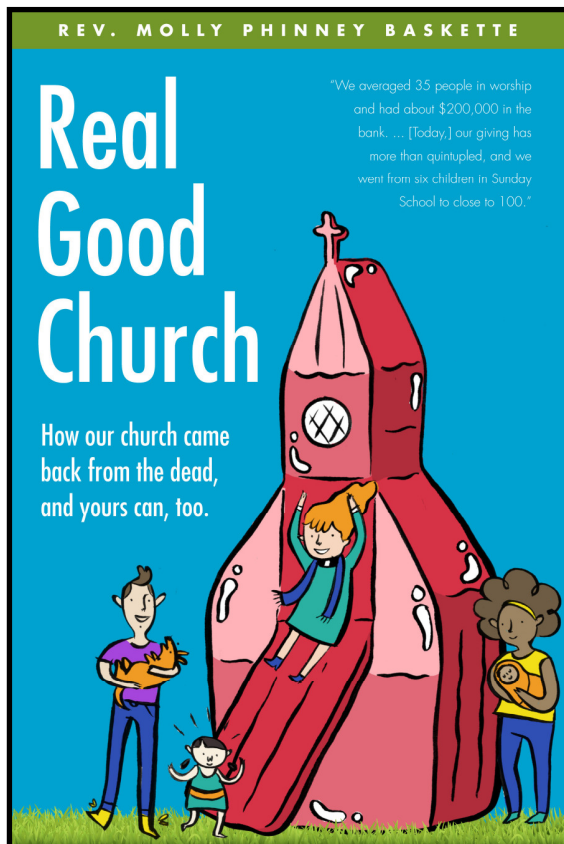
NEWS AND EVENTS FROM THE UCC

First Church Somerville goes National!!! This week, Pilgrim Press began distribution of Molly Phinney Baskette's book, entitled *Real Good Church* wherein she tells the story of the ten year turnaround of our sister UCC congregation, First Church, Somerville (FCS). While we have decided to "re-start" our church, rather than "re-new", I am confident there will be a great deal to be learned from FCS's experience and 'Molly's Manual'. Emerging Church leader, Brian McLaren, has been wowed by the book and has been posting quotes all month on his facebook page.

Brian D. McLaren praises *Real Good Church*. . .

"OK, folks: it's here: the practical, encouraging, field-tested book to help pastors and lay leaders turn declining churches around. Really. This is it! It names the skills you need and books to help you get them, gives you samples of job descriptions and letters and lots of other super-practical stuff. As a veteran pastor, I can tell you that Molly has packed these pages with the guidance you need."

The Mass Conference of the UCC recently offered this blog post of Molly's invitation. Maybe we should read it together this summer and mine the pages for our future?



Molly Phinney Baskette: Blog Post from the MACUCC Web Site:

One of your sister churches, First Church Somerville UCC, where I have pastored since 2003, has enjoyed a remarkable degree of growth during the last decade: from 30 to 150 people in worship (351 on Easter!). Our pledges have nearly sextupled—multiplied like rabbits. I would guess that 80% of our people are under age 50, that 60% are under 30. Yes, we have actual twentysomethings in our church: many of them.

Part of our 'luck' is derived from the blessing of having a church building on a busy urban street in one of the youngest communities in Massachusetts. But our growth is no accident. As one of our members put it, "we worked really hard to get into a position to receive the gifts that God wanted to give us."

I wrote a book—an instruction manual, really—that the Pilgrim Press is about to publish. It's called [*Real Good Church: How Our Church Came Back from the Dead and Yours Can Too*](#).

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I wrote it because I was fielding so many emails and phone calls from people who wanted to know “the ONE thing you all did to turn your church around.”

It wasn't one thing. It was 200 things: about signage, about stewardship, about advertising, about staffing, about creative worship. I didn't have time to tell every person all 200 things that they wanted and perhaps needed to know, so I wrote down them all down. Now everyone can know what we have learned from others, invented ourselves, tried, tested, failed at, adapted and brought to fruition.

I also wrote this book because I am huge church nerd. The church saved my life—multiple times. The first time was when I was 4 years old, the daughter of a single mom on welfare in a new community without many supports. The most recent time was when I underwent chemotherapy for an aggressive cancer discovered accidentally that should have taken my life. It would have taken my life were it not for excellent medical care—but, just as importantly, the kind of care that churches are great at providing: casseroles and child care, meaning-making in a difficult world, and most importantly, space to pray and grieve and rail at heaven and experience everyday joys no matter what is going on.

I love the church, and as our mainline churches close by the score, I want to do whatever I can to make sure more of them stick around for the long haul, because there are people who need us. Most of those people are not inside our walls, but outside of them. Renewal means a fundamental reorientation toward the people who are not here among us yet—and it's not necessarily intuitive to us how we will reach them, welcome them, assimilate them.

This kind of adaptive change is not easy. It can be very frightening, and the work at times is discouraging. But it's so worth it. If you don't believe that it's possible, come on down and worship with us some Sunday, and see for yourself. Light your candle from ours, and bring it home to your own community.

Blessings and peace,

Rev. Molly Baskette and the entire community of First Church Somerville UCC

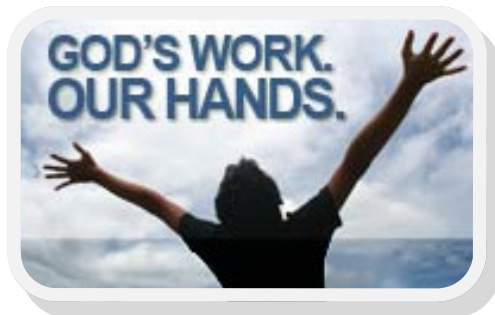
Book excerpts:

“Often in churches we are stationed at the back door, anxious about and attending to one or two or a few people who have decided to leave, and nobody's paying any attention to the front door, where (perhaps many) people just coming in are looking for orientation and nurturing assimilation. Don't privilege the people who have been at your church over the people outside your community who don't even know about you yet—these are *all* God's people, and if you are a pastor you took vows to “minister impartially to the needs of all.”

Your work, as a pastor or lay leader, is to build up your own tolerance for disappointing people. Learn how to evaluate criticism for what it can teach you, don't take it personally, and don't let it slow you down or hijack God's work.”



“I’ve read everything, and know that in the bibliography of church renewal, there’s a lot of plain old junk, and there’s also a lot of stuff that is great but falls under the category of what I call “swirly talk.” That is, it



provides a great theological rationale, but it doesn’t tell you What To Do.

I’m not going to tell you what to do, but I will tell you what we did, and let you, who know your communities best, decide what applies. I’m writing this manual because our church is alive and well, *and* yours can be, too. Our demographics may be different from yours, our leaders are different, but many of the things we did to survive and thrive can be replicated in any church, anywhere.”



Save the Date: The Next Super Saturday—October 25, 2014

New Location!! Keefe Regional Technical High School, 750 Winter Street, Framingham MA
Super Saturdays began in Massachusetts a number of years ago, and were similar to events held in Connecticut. This is the first time the two conferences worked together on such an event, drawing workshop and worship leaders from both states. “We look forward to many more cooperative adventures with the Massachusetts Conference,” said Siladi, who has spoken increasingly of nurturing interdependence among congregations and expressions of the UCC. “We share a commitment to making our voice known and living out of the core values of our beloved church.

To read about this last Super Saturday, which drew 650 attendees—see this reflection: <http://www.macucc.org/news/detail/270>