

First UCC Happenings



MARCH 2021



No one expected it. At least not the way it happened. There was no one, to my knowledge, who believed God would become human and identify with us in our misery. If so, then he'd be a king, a conqueror, but isn't that what He ultimately was? That, however, is the message of Lent. God entered our world to stand with us, not against us.

Lent is forty days because Jesus was forty days in the wilderness being tempted by the devil. This trial is a picture of his whole mission, shouldering the human condition, standing with us, not apart from us.

At that time there was a community, where the Dead Sea scrolls were later found, that separated itself from the rest of the world. It saw the world as "us and them". The religious leaders who lived among the people still stood apart from the people and also thought in terms of "us and them". Jesus came and turned everything upside down.

God is love, one of his disciples would later write. Another would say, Love bears all things. Where did they get this? From Jesus. The law of Christ is to bear one another's burdens.

Why Lent? Because we need to be reminded of this again and again. It's not natural for us to think like this. Like the religious leaders of the day, it's more natural for us in our estrangement from God, due to our sin, to think that God's strange work, his wrath, his love, is really his true and proper work. We need Jesus to show us again and again that God's true and proper work is his love because he is love.

We also need Lent because we too are called to be for other people, but we can't

be for other people if we're just like other people. We have to have something to offer. Holiness is essential.

I invite you to a Lenten observance, not as an obligation but as an opportunity, an opportunity to be renewed in your understanding of how God works, entering into our situation and overcoming it, and an opportunity to be renewed in your commitment to be more and more like the God you're coming to know in Christ.

May you see once more, during this Lenten season, the glory of God revealed in the person of Christ, and as you do, may you be changed from one degree of glory to the next.

Rev. Ed Lilley



From the Director of Music

Diane Drury

I'm Beginning to See the Light!

As people begin to get vaccinated and warmer weather seems around the corner, I wanted to provide a little summary of what the experts are saying about the state and future of singing in the age of Covid-19. First of all, there needs to be a whole lot more research into this topic, but there does seem like the end is in sight. A recent interview with Dr. Anthony Fauci for the performing arts community gives us a great deal of hope.

The situation will have to be constantly monitored, and folks will need to be ready to change back to older safety precautions as needed. This is not a case of moving forward and not looking back. We need to always be aware of the case levels in our area, how many people are vaccinated, variants in our area, and those kinds of statistics, and be willing to revert back to previous precautions. What Dr. Fauci thinks is that, once 70 to 80% of Americans are vaccinated, and case levels are low, and people still use our February 2021 precautions (everyone wearing masks, washing hands, and socially distancing themselves), it may be safe to return to singing together. Outside singing, with good air flow, is always going to be safer, but powerful enough HEPA filters can help inside.

This seems to me to indicate that, in the Spring, we might try some experimental singing scenarios. Outdoor singing, spaced 6 feet apart, wearing masks, would be a start. I do warn everyone that hearing each other outside is a challenge, and adding 6 feet of

distance will be frustrating. Masks will be needed in the beginning and we know how not fun that will be. We may try some of this during our outside worship services mid-April through June. Of course, weather will be a factor, and we will have to be very flexible. If we have to move everything back inside due to weather, we might have to not sing. Only time and more research will tell. One thing that Dr. Fauci made clear was, just because the CDC and state guidelines allow churches to do something, that does not necessarily make it a safe practice. A lot of leeway has been given to churches in those guidelines so as not to impinge on religious freedoms. I am going with the science and utmost safety.

By Fall 2021, Dr. Fauci believes that things (barring some unforeseen circumstance) may return to a degree of normal. We may still need masks and social distancing (perhaps not as far as 6 feet) for a while, but it will be a whole lot safer. We ought to start now to look at the spaces we gather in to make the air circulation better, especially our smaller rooms. Gathering in our larger spaces like the sanctuary and Wallace Hall will be our safest option at first.

So, during this season of Lent and waiting for Easter to come, there is hope right around the corner! We will continue to have **Zoom Evensong at 7 pm Thurs., Mar. 4, and our Zoom Hymn Sing at 7 pm Thurs., Mar. 18. Virtual Choir recordings will continue for now.** Come April, after Easter, new things will be coming and I can't wait!



Beloved, Love in Action

“Do your little bit of good where you are. It’s those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world.” – Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Love is a verb. Not simply a feeling or thought. Grounded in God’s love for us, we are called to act, to love. 1 John 4:11 puts it this way, “Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.” We take seemingly small actions to live out God's love. Here’s the beautiful thing: together in community, we can change the world.

In 2019, Magnolia United Church of Christ in Seattle, WA, held its inaugural Community in Action Sunday. Determining that ‘church in action’ was a key to their vitality, instead of holding church worship as on a typical Sunday, they were

love in action. Participating in five diverse service projects, the congregants restored habitat at a local park, made blankets for children, helped at their local animal shelter, tended an elder garden at the Native American cultural center, and cleaned up and cleared brush at a homeless encampment.

While average worship attendance runs about 50, that Sunday, over 150 people took part.

After participating in their service projects, the congregants gathered. The Reverend Marci Scott-Weis, Magnolia UCC minister, commented on her service: “It was messy, chaotic, oozing in vitality and a whole lot of fun to be the church that morning.” She continued, “one girl said to me, ‘That was so much fun, can we do church every week like this?’”

With such positive responses, Magnolia UCC held its second annual Community in 2020. “It was such an amazing morning seeing folks from our congregation and from our community join together to help our neighbors,” Scott-Weis said. “It was fun, crazy busy, church at its best.”

How can you put your love into action? Who would want to join you in that work? How can you have fun doing it? Love is a verb indeed. Our church can be God’s love through our serving and giving. Can you pledge to take part and live God’s love?



First UCC Weekly Offering

Jan 31	\$ 1,412.50	Feb 7	\$ 2,355.00
Feb 14	\$ 1,370.00	Feb 21	\$ 945.00

Thank you to all who have practiced stewardship through your gifts during this challenging time. Prayerfully consider your tithing to support the ministries and staff of First UCC. Thank you!



Treasurer's Report as of 02/25/2021

General Operating Checking Account Balance	\$ 7,576.40
Breakdown:	
Bills to Be Paid Through 03/03/2021	\$ 2,516.04
Mission & Evangelism	\$ 1,330.55
General Fund	\$ 3,587.66
UCC Local Missions Grant	\$ 142.15
Reserve Fund Balance	\$ 1,007.48



Church-Wide Prayer:
Pray with us each day at noon

March 1-15

O God, you see that we have no strength in ourselves. Keep us both outwardly and inwardly. Defend us from all adversities which hurt the body, and cleanse us from all evil thoughts which afflict the mind; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

March 16-31

Almighty God, look on the humble desires of your servants. Stretch forth the right hand of your majesty and be our sure defense; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Wider Missions & Outreach

Our Lenten project continues of collecting food items for the HELP pantry. Please add something for HELP to your grocery cart when you order or when you shop. Perhaps a "buy one get one" could be shared with our collection.

Please bring an item for each Sunday in Lent (that's 6 Sundays till Easter). There are so many people during this Pandemic who are needing grocery help. Please share your own bounty.

One Great Hour of Sharing is one of the 5 major offerings of the UCC. It is usually collected in March, but will be postponed this year until April 18. The theme this year is Let Love Flow. It is concentrated on those areas in the world who have water shortages.

The Eastern Virginia Association is asking that each person in the congregations of the EVA donate \$1 per day in March (\$31). Help is needed for the ongoing programs & staffing expenses of the EVA. Please do contribute to this important ministry.

Wear masks & stay healthy. Blessings to all of you.

Pat Kline & Carol Diehl, co-chairs

Once again, we will decorate the sanctuary with Easter Lilies for Easter, April 4th, 2021. Cost of the lilies this year will be \$11. ***The deadline for ordering is March 23rd.***



Order forms will be available at the church, or you can write on a sheet of paper how many lilies you would like, the total amount, and who they are in honor or memory of. Place your form in the offering plate any Sunday or drop it off or mail it to the church office. Checks should be made payable to First UCC, marked "Lilies." Thank you!

MARCH BIRTHDAYS



6 Lyn Abbott

8 Cary Bocklet

10 Russell Hook

22 Ellen Hook

If you have a birthday and it's not on the list, please let us know so we can correct our records.

March Anniversaries

Mike & Diane Drury
March 10th

Gene & Ellen Hook
March 20th

Vinton & Lois Gates
March 27th



*If you have an anniversary in
March, April, or May,
please let us know,
so we can correct our records.

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TOGETHER Worshipping God
 Growing Spiritually
 Serving Others

**Indoor and Online Worship
Services (via Facebook)
Sundays at 10:30am**

**Daily devotional booklets are
available for pickup anytime in
the church's mailbox.**