



## WOODBURY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

4 Church Street  
Woodbury, CT 06798  
www.woodburyumc.net

Office: (203) 263-4775 • Fax: (203) 263-5867



Rev. John A. Thomason, Pastor

# The Life of the Church

by Pastor John

November 11, 2019

On Sunday, November 10, our 2019 Church Conference was held jointly with other churches in the Western Frontier Parish of the Connecticut District. Thank you to Lay Leader *Carolyn Shay* and Finance chair *Toby McGrath* for joining me in representing WUMC at this event, which took place at New Life UMC in New Fairfield. Thanks also to the chairs of boards, committees, and ministry teams who submitted reports for inclusion in our Church Conference booklet; and to *Kathy Craig* for her usual masterful job of assembling and printing the entire document. Copies of the booklet are available in the narthex and on the literature table in the foyer outside the church office.

As I have in past years, I'd like to share with all of you my Pastor's Report for the Church Conference.

### **PASTOR'S REPORT** by John Thomason 2019 Charge Conference Woodbury UMC

I would characterize this past year at WUMC as a time of seed-planting which is bringing hope for an abundant harvest. I'll highlight several areas in which our church has planted seeds for future growth.

1. The long effort to refurbish our sanctuary has been completed. Our worship space is now more attractive, functional, and versatile. The hope is that both regular attendees and visitors will have an enhanced worship experience and come back for more! "A Service of Thanksgiving and Dedication of Our Sanctuary" has been scheduled for Sunday, November 24. District Superintendent Rev. Alpher Sylvester will join us in christening the revamped facility and also preach that day.
2. The updating of our worship space notwithstanding, we have no illusions about the old adage from the movie *Field of Dreams*: "If we build it, they will come." At the very time improvements have been made to the sanctuary, our average worship attendance has declined. WUMC is facing the same cultural and demographic changes confronting other churches in the Northeast – changes which make it a formidable challenge to maintain our current level of participation and attract newcomers. Therefore, we are redoubling our efforts to care for our own flock and also reach out to the community in witness and service. The Open Doors Ministry Team continues to implement new ways of inviting and welcoming prospective

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members. The Community Assessment Team is working with other ministry teams to identify the needs of our neighbors and find creative avenues to address these needs.

3. WUMC has had serious financial challenges in 2019. We are operating with a budget deficit, and cash reserves are diminishing rapidly. The Finance Committee has faced these realities and communicated them to the congregation. Like any household which struggles with cash flow challenges, a house of faith has only two options: to reduce spending or increase income (or seek to do both). The Finance Committee and Trustees are providing careful management of our monies, programs and properties, as well as exploring ways to cut expenses. To encourage increased giving, the Stewardship Committee sponsored a New Consecration Sunday a year ago, which brought a fresh approach to stewardship education and yielded positive results in pledging. The New Consecration Sunday model will be followed again this November, and we are hopeful that the congregation will continue to respond generously.
4. This year began with a major development in our wider United Methodist connection – the Special Session of General Conference which reaffirmed and strengthened our denomination’s existing policy on homosexuality. Our own church leaders have sought to inform the congregation about the issues involved and foster healthy, respectful discussion. Last February, I offered a four-part study series on “Homosexuality and the Church” which was well-attended. The Church Council then created an “Our Way Forward Together” subcommittee to help shepherd the congregation through further discussion. Early this fall they conducted a survey of church members’ convictions about homosexuality and church policy toward persons who are homosexual. As expected, the survey elicited strong opinions across the spectrum. The goal of the “Our Way Forward Together” group remains the same – to encourage honest expression of differing beliefs and a commitment to maintain unity in the midst of our diversity. Like all UMC churches, our future is clouded by uncertainty as we seek to determine how to respond to the decision of General Conference and await possible developments in denominational realignment. In the meantime, WUMC has sought to plant seeds of open communication and mutual love, hoping for a harvest of healing and renewal.

Beyond my regular pastoral duties, I remain involved in several denominational activities – the NYAC Board of Ordained Ministry, as well as a Professional Excellence Group and Cooperative Parish Team for regional UMC clergy. At the community level, I’m actively engaged with CLERICUS (the Woodbury ministerial alliance), the Woodbury Community Services Council (which includes the local Food Bank), and the Naugatuck Valley Project (an area organization which strives to promote social justice in several arenas).

For spiritual enrichment, I made a week-long retreat at a Benedictine monastery in Big Sur, California. Upon my return, I preached a sermon series of “Summer Reflections” about my reading and personal experiences while at the monastery.

2019 has not been a year of great harvest for WUMC, but neither has it been a year of drought. A number of seeds have been sown which can be expected to bear promising fruit. I’m grateful as always to be one of the caretakers of our garden!

Grace and peace,  
*John Thomason*