

Our Mission

By God's Grace, West Parish Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, is committed to Nurturing and Celebrating God's Love in our lives, in the Church Family, in the Community, and in the World.

April 2023 newsletter

Steeple View

West Parish Congregational Church

United Church of Christ

Pastor's Perspective

Our family recently returned from our trip to Ireland for our son, Ben's, wedding. I hope you'll indulge me, this is a longer than usual newsletter article, but I want to share our experience with you.

There was so much anticipation leading up to the trip. It seemed like we had been waiting for it for years. After a year in which both of our fathers died, Mary and I were ready for a celebration. It was an expensive trip since all four of us, including our sons Evan and Liam, were going – but it helped that Liam paid his way. Prior to the trip, we also had helped Ben and Jess with financing the wedding so I don't want to think about how much the entire thing cost. I think it would be pretty shocking. Besides, an event such as this is a once in a lifetime thing and the memories are priceless.

Having been to Dublin just a year and a half ago for my Sabbatical, it felt very familiar. We even stayed at the same hotel where we stayed before. I felt as though I was beginning to know my way around the city but soon discovered I knew less than I thought. I was thankful that Ben met us at the airport—at 5 in the morning—and helped us purchase LEAP cards for the bus and rode with us on a crowded bus and tram with all of our luggage back to his and Jess' apartment. The weather was colder than it was in Maine with a damp, biting wind. Two of Ben's friends from Fryeburg were on the bus from Portland to Boston and the flight over so it was good to see some familiar faces. Ben had about 10 friends who made the trip and attended, along with a couple of their girlfriends, which is a testament to the friendships he made growing up in Fryeburg.



The next few days were spent sightseeing, spending time with Ben and Jess, along with my two sisters and their families. Ben was slightly preoccupied by trying to play tour guide for us as well as his friends while Jess obsessed over the final details for the wedding. One day we went to Glasnevin cemetery, the national cemetery of Ireland, where many of the legendary historical figures are buried including Daniel O’Connell and Michael Collins. We then met up with Jess’ parents and niece at the famous Gravediggers pub and I had coddle – a sausage stew – and Guinness. Can’t get any more Irish than that!



The next day we took a bus tour to Northern Ireland, going to Belfast where most of our group went to the Titanic museum while Liam and I took a “Black Cab” tour which dealt with the Troubles and the Protestant-Catholic divide which has torn apart Northern Ireland for decades. We visited the Peace Wall, literally a Berlin wall right through the city, where we signed our names. It is heartbreaking to hear the history but there is hope that the wall will soon be torn down and that a reunified Ireland may happen in our lifetimes. The IRA party, Sinn Fein, is stronger than ever with a female leader, Mary Lou McDonald and, as our tour guide pointed out, “the world needs more female leaders.”

From Belfast, we traveled to Dunluce Castle, where the show Game of Thrones was filmed, and then to the Giant’s Causeway (the other end is on the island of Staffa near Iona) where we ate lunch and I had an incredible fish stew with, of course, Guinness. The clouds broke, the sun came out, and the scenery was stunning. The Antrim coastline was absolutely amazing. Our tour guide on the bus tended to ramble and his recounting of history was all over the place. Somehow he went from the Troubles all the way back to the 1600’s and then leapt ahead to Michael Collins and the Easter uprising and the war for independence in the early 20’s. He also tried to lead the group in singing an Irish ballad and I still have nightmares about his voice. But it was a great day.

I have to say a word about St. Patrick’s Day in Dublin. I had heard that half a million people would be in the city for the parade so I was nervous about going. We did end up going and we found a spot where we could see it and I’m very glad we did. There were great marching bands, acrobats dangling from cranes, interesting floats with giant puppets, and, thankfully, this was before the public drunkenness really got out of hand. Later, we went to a Festival which celebrated Irish culture and heritage and met up with my sister, brother-in-law, and nephew. We

walked over 6 miles that day! And, yes, there was more Guinness. I'm surprised that Guinness doesn't come out of the taps in Dublin!

The wedding day, the day after St. Patrick's Day, arrived and Ben, along with his best man, met us in front of the hotel to take a taxi to the venue, about a 10 minute drive away. But, it being St. Patrick's weekend and the day of a championship rugby match between Ireland and England, there were no taxis to be had! The taxi companies weren't taking requests from the hotel. But the receptionist was able to snag us one and, though we were a bit late, we were able to get to the venue in time. I told Ben that I once had a wedding party arrive 45 minutes late to the wedding so this was nothing.



We arrived and it was a cozy tavern called "Angler's Rest" with all of the wedding area upstairs on the second floor – small, intimate room for the ceremony, central bar/dance floor, and dining area. It was a great spot and about as Irish as you could possibly want. We met the officiant, a humanist, who instructed us on where to go and what to do. Humanists are becoming increasingly recognized as a third option between a religious officiant and a strictly secular, justice of the peace type officiant. The best comparison is probably Unitarian Universalist. They believe in free will, self-discovery, and achieving one's full human potential – all without the need for a theistic framework. It was a bit difficult for me to remove God or any mention of God from the liturgy but it completely fit Ben and Jess. There was a cello and guitar trio that played songs they had selected. They began the service by lighting two candles representing their two, distinct lives coming together and, later in the service, had a binding ceremony representing the binding together of two lives into one (it's where the phrase "tying the knot" comes from). I read a poem by the Irish poet John O'Donohue, a blessing on marriage, and Jess' nephew, Charlie, read a poem that he had written for them. Ben and Jess had written their own vows and they read them to each other. They were beautiful words straight from their hearts. Jess even said something about accepting Ben and his love for Philly sports, something that Mary didn't realize she was promising when she married Ben's dad! Words can't really describe what I was feeling as I sat there watching the ceremony. It was beautiful and completely reflected Ben and Jess, their love for each other, and that love being affirmed by family and friends.

All I could think about was the story of the wedding of Canaan and Jesus turning water into wine. The abundance all around, filled and overflowing. Mary and I clasped each other's hands and just sat there in awe and wonder. It went beyond blessing into stunned reverence for the love we felt all around.

From the service, after a time of greeting and picture taking, we moved into the reception time. Yes, there was more Guinness, along with Prosecco, wine, and anything you might want from the bar. Ben had informed me beforehand that I would be giving a speech. It is an Irish tradition to have the father of the bride, the father of the groom, the best man, and the groom himself to all give speeches. A tad bit patriarchal, don't you think? In my speech, I talked about the importance of Oceanwood, the camp in Ocean Park, where Mary and I had met and where Ben and Jess met when they worked there on staff. It is a sacred place and there is something about the work--working closely, side-by-side, to serve others--that brings people together. It is an incubator for relationships. I also talked about how Ben, after meeting Jess, transferred to University College in Dublin to be with Jess but he did so in kind of a sneaky way. He called us and asked for us to send him his birth certificate but he said he needed it for work, not mentioning that he was in the process of transferring. Later, he told us what he had done, and informed us that we **WOULD** love Jess. Well, that was definitely the truth. And it led to this moment.



The rest of the reception was just a happy celebration of food, drink, dancing, and rejoicing with family and friends. Another Irish tradition, "Second Day" or "Seconds" took place the next day in a pub near their apartment where family and friends came together for a final celebration with Chinese take away and pizza along with...more Guinness. We invited Jess' parents, Doug and Val, to come to Bethel to experience the foliage season this October. And, the next day, we were on the flight home. Unfortunately, I was feeling worse and worse through those last couple of days and that continued into our time at home. But it couldn't tarnish the memories we made that week.

Thanks for reading this and blessings for Holy Week and Easter as we walk the way of Jesus... from Jerusalem to the cross to the empty tomb.

Peace,

Tim

Christian Education

It has been a busy month for Christian Education activities and we have a full calendar of activities for April:

Potlucks and programs

We are thankful for the World Service committee organizing the potluck on March 17th about Pilgrim Lodge with Liz Charles McGough, Director of Pilgrim Lodge



This month there are 2 potluck meals: Thursday April 6 (6-7:30 PM) – **Seder Meal**. The Seder ceremony will be led by Doug Alford.

The Alford family is providing the ceremonial food but everyone else should bring a potluck dish to share. The only restriction is that the potluck dish should not contain grains, breads or pork. The Seder meal is the one that Jesus shared with his disciples for the Last Supper.

Friday April 21 (5-7 PM) – Potluck again sponsored by World Service. The program will be Adam Leff from Gould Academy (assisted by Quin Doyle) about his work with refugees in Lewiston. Please bring a dish to share.

Intergenerational Bell Choir led by Simon Smith

Youth group this month has focused on practicing with several adults to have a bell choir for Easter. The remaining practices will be at the regular Youth Group time Fridays (5-7 PM) on March 31, and April 7th. There will be a brief practice before the Easter service Sunday April 9th.

Other Youth Group Events

Friday April 14 – Youth group (5-7 pm) Service Project

Friday April 28 – Youth group (5-7 pm} We will be preparing for the May day celebration after church on Apr 30

The final CE activity of April will be an **Intergenerational Church Picnic celebrating May Day on** Sunday Apr 30 after church (11 AM – 1 PM) Bring your own picnic lunch. The events will include a May pole, and May basket to shared with shut-ins and friends.

Coin Collection April 16

During Lent the Deacons ask people to save your coins. This fundraiser for the church has been on hold since the pandemic. Please plan to bring coins to church on the first Sunday after Easter, April 16. This will be our first in person collection since Covid. The photo is 2019. The money supports the ongoing mission of the church. Please bring finger food for a light lunch following church.



Thanks

Iris and Tim Roberts have been taking clothing collections to Lewiston to assist new refugees primarily from Afghanistan. Church members have been very generous with these donations. Iris said it is time to take a pause with these collections. Adam Leff, who coordinates these collections, cites storage restrictions at this time. Iris will let the congregation know when there are more specific needs. She thanks everyone who has helped these refugees feel welcome in Maine.

Thanks to our technology team for their ongoing work during each Sunday morning service. Eric Boyle-Wight does the technology during the non-winter months. His job with Inland Woods and Trails requires his working Sundays during the snowy times. Sharon Lyon and Henri List have stepped up to provide the ongoing connectivity for our screens during service and the live-streaming service to reach more people. And the fourth member of this team, behind the scene, is Evan LeConey, who puts together the materials, Kudos to all of you.



O-U Association gathering

We Are One in the Spirit. Save Sunday, April 30, 2 PM for the Spring Meeting of the Oxford Union Association, a virtual sharing and reunion of the Oxford Union Association.

Oxford Union Association is made up of all the UCC churches in Oxford County and a few in Cumberland County. The delegates usually meet twice a year. The Zoom link will be available closer to that date. Liz Charles McGough will speak about Pilgrim Lodge. We will have election of officers for the next year. The Social Action Team for the conference will talk about their work. And Alexia Fuller-Wright, Association Conference Minister, will discuss Maine Conference activities.

Birthdays for April

Take a few moments to wish these church friends a happy birthday and brighten up their day.

April 10 – Maren DeCato

April 23 – Steve Lovejoy

April 20 – Mary Scanlon

April 26 – Melinda Remington

April 22 – Ben LeConey

April 28 – Faelan Boyle-Wight

Dates for April

Friday, March 31 Faith and Film Series at the GEM: “Jesus Revolution”, Social time at 6 PM, film at 6:30 PM, discussion to follow. We resume our series on faith in film with this movie about the “Jesus Movement” in the early 70’s. Invite your friends!

Sunday, April 2 Palm Sunday Worship with Communion at 10 AM (also live streaming on YouTube Live), during the service we will welcome new members and coffee fellowship time with a special cake

Tuesday, April 4 Prayer Group at 8:45 AM at church and on ZOOM
Book Group at 7 PM at Kay and Jim Rectors’ home
Easter Community Chorus Rehearsal at church at 6:30 PM

Wednesday, April 5 Men’s Breakfast at 8 AM at church and on ZOOM;
Easter brass band rehearsal at 6:30 PM in sanctuary

Thursday, April 6 Maundy Thursday and beginning of Passover:
Seder meal led by Doug and Andee Alford at 6 PM, followed by a potluck supper
Foot Washing Service at 7:30 PM in chapel

Friday, April 7 Good Friday - Youth Group and bell practice, 5-7 PM

Sunday, April 9 Easter Sunday: Sunrise Service at 6 AM on Paradise Hill
Worship at 10 AM at church (also live streaming on YouTube Live)

Tuesday, April 11 Prayer Group at 8:45 AM at church/on ZOOM
Trustees 6:30 PM

Wednesday, April 12 Christian Education Committee, 12 PM at church/on ZOOM

Friday, April 14 Youth Group, 5-7 PM – service project

Sunday, April 16 Worship at 10 AM at church (also live streaming on YouTube Live);
Coin rolling fundraiser after church – bring finger food for lunch

Tuesday, April 18 Prayer Group at 8:45 AM at church/on ZOOM

Wednesday, April 19 Music Committee at 4:30 PM on ZOOM
World Service committee 3 – 4 PM in person and on ZOOM

Friday, April 21 Potluck Supper at 5 PM, speaker is Gould Teacher/Advisor Adam Leff
on Afghan refugee resettlement in Lewiston

Sunday, April 23 Worship at 10 AM at church (also live streaming on YouTube Live)

Tuesday, April 25 Prayer Group at 8:45 AM at church/on ZOOM

Friday, April 28 Middle School Youth Group, 5-7 PM

Sunday, April 30 Worship at 10 AM at church (also live streaming on YouTube Live),
Oxford Union Spring Association Meeting at 2 PM on Zoom.

Save the Date – May 12 9-1 PM is the Smile Fund Yard Sale

Love Bowl for April is

One Great Hour of Sharing

One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) special mission offering of the United Church of Christ involves you in disaster, refugee/immigration, and development ministries throughout the world. The theme this year is **Let Love Flow**. When a disaster strikes or people are displaced or made refugees by violence or extreme poverty, you are part of the immediate response and of the long-term recovery.

Through OGHS you engage in holistic development programs including health care, education, agriculture, food sustainability, micro-financing and women's empowerment. Because the UCC relates in mutual partnership to churches and organizations through Global Ministries and worldwide response & recovery networks, your contributions to One Great Hour of Sharing put you in the right place at the right time for the relief, accompaniment and recovery of the most vulnerable. You meet immediate needs and you address the underlying causes that create those needs in the first place.



Deacon's Report

Palm Sunday - April 2 Attendees are asked to enter through the chapel, take a palm from the basket on the table and wait until the music starts. We will then enter the sanctuary waving our palms. During this service we will be welcoming new members with presentation of certificates and a special cake during coffee hour.

Maundy Thursday - April 6, 6 – 7:30 PM - We will be having a Sedar meal led by Doug and Andee Alford in the dining room. Please bring a dish to share for the potluck. Out of respect please avoid pork and no bread or rolls. At 7:30 PM, following the Passover meal Tim will lead a service of foot washing upstairs. **Saturday, April 8** If you wish to bring Easter flowers, please have them in the church by noon. Leave a note if you wish your donation to be recognized or if donating is in honor of someone. The church will not be open on Good Friday.

Easter Sunday - April 9 The Sunrise Service will be on top of Paradise at **6 AM**.

Easter Sunday service 10 AM— Simon Smith has been working with the young people for a handbell choir for Easter. Tom Davis has organized a community choir for Easter Sunday, with one rehearsal on Tuesday, April 4 at 6:30 PM. The Mahoosuc Community Band brass ensemble will play a number and accompany singing on the hymns.

Sunday, April 16- Coins for Lent - After church, please bring your coins and finger food for a

potluck lunch. We will have a bite to eat and roll the coins we have saved. Wrappers for coins will be provided.

Book group March 2

Book group Tuesday, April 4 at 7 PM at Jim and Kay Rector's home on Paradise. We'll discuss *The Lincoln Highway: A Novel* by Amor Towles.

If you want to read the next book, it is *The Power of One* by Bryce Courtenay. We will meet Tuesday, May 2, 7 PM at the home of Jim and Jane Chandler, 65 Camp Road, Bryant Pond. You can join by ZOOM if interested by clicking on this link.

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89660089353?pwd=b2NITng5TUNMTE9xSVJMSzV6ODhrQT09>

Lenten Lunches a success

It was nice to return to sharing a meal with Christians from other denominations during Lent. After a 3 year hiatus, people were wanting to share a meal and share fellowship and spiritual reflection. Churches participating including the Methodist Church, the Episcopal House Church, Our Lady of the Snows Catholic Church, Locke Mills Union Church, West Bethel Community Church and our church.

