



# The Cornerstone

News from the First Church of Christ, Congregational, United Church of Christ  
Unionville, CT

MAR/APR 2025

## *The Pastor's Pen*

Lent begins this year on Wednesday, March 5, Ash Wednesday, a day we are called to recognize the ways we have failed to live up to the demands of the gospel--loving God with the fullness of heart, mind and spirit and loving our neighbors as we love ourselves. Ash Wednesday is a day of repentance, a reminder of our mortality, which is what ashes bring to mind: "Remember, O mortal one, you are dust, and to dust you shall return." The word Lent comes from the Old English *leneten*, which means springtime, and from the Germanic word *langitinaz*, which means long days or lengthening. In the northern hemisphere, the days are indeed lengthening as spring approaches, this year on March 20.

Lent has traditionally been a time of spiritual discipline, which often includes such acts as fasting, renouncing something, charitable giving and prayer. Lent especially reminds us to pay attention to our prayer life, as we take the time to be with God. And yet, if we are honest with ourselves, we realize that prayer does not come easily for us. I don't know who said, "**Pray as you can, not as you can't,**" but that seems like pretty good advice. We all have a million excuses, so many concerns that prevent us from praying. Perhaps the most common is "I don't know how," and so we easily surrender to the idea that praying should be left to the professionals, like the clergy, or to the saintly, or maybe even to the children, whose naïveté allows them to approach God with trust and openness. But the truth is we don't have to master prayer the way we mastered algebra or calculus. We can begin where we are--with what is known as **simple prayer**.

Simple prayer is the most common form of prayer, and we find it scattered all across the pages of the Bible. There was nothing particularly saintly about Moses, when he complained to God that he was burdened beyond capacity by "stiff necked" people. "I didn't give birth to them," he complained to God. "So why should I carry them in my bosom, as a nurse carries a sucking child?" It was a good question, and also a good prayer---good in the sense that the prayer came deep from within Moses' heart. He was laying bare his soul to God. And then there was the prophet, Elisha, who wanted to retaliate against the children who had mocked him, calling him a baldhead. His motives were mean and vengeful. He cursed the children in God's name and then, according to the story (2 Kings 2:24), two she-bears emerged and mauled forty-two boys! Elisha was sure his prayer had been answered. What about the psalmist who sang about the children of his enemies being dashed against the rocks? (Psalm 127:9) These are not the prayers, which we would consider ennobling or spiritually enriching, but they are prayers, nonetheless, emerging from the depths of anger, hurt, and humiliation. C.S. Lewis once said, "**We should lay before God what is in us, not what we think should be in us.**"

And yet we should also realize that the same hearts, which prayed out curses, also articulated wisdom and compassion. As much as Moses complained about his people, he pleaded with God on their behalf: "But now, if you will only forgive their sin, but if not, blot me out of the book you have written." The same Elisha, who cursed the children, showed great compassion for a woman who had no children. "At this season, in due time, you shall embrace a son," he told her. And the psalmist, who would be happy for the death of his enemies' children, also loved the Law. "Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation day and night." Simple prayer, in other words, is simply this: the honest expression to God of what is in our hearts. And our hearts contain so much!

Someone called simple prayer beginning prayer, because it comes in the form of what we often do at the beginning of our relationship with God---ask for something. Perhaps we think that such prayer looks too childish or self-centered, but as the Spanish mystic, Saint Theresa of Avila, reminds us, "There is no stage of prayer so sublime that it isn't necessary to return to the beginning." When Jesus taught the Lord's Prayer, he counseled simple prayer when he told us to pray, "Give us our daily bread." That is simple prayer at its most basic level. We need food to live!

There is danger in simple prayer, but then there is danger in all prayer. Do you think that when Jesus prayed in Gethsemane for the cup to pass from him, he was aching to hear God's answer? The danger of simple prayer is that we can remain so consumed with self that we ignore God, or as Paul said in the Book of Romans, we end up worshipping the creature, rather than the creator. That is the danger, but there is no way around it, except by going through it. In the beginning, prayer does seem to be all about us, but in time, there can be a shift. I like what Richard J. Foster says in his book called *Prayer*. He writes, "We pass from thinking of God as part of our lives to the realization that we are part of God's life."

So, "pray as you can, not as you can't." Take the time to bring to God what is in your heart. Your heart is filled with many things, and sometimes we do not even realize what is there---until we take the time to pay attention.

Yours in Christ,  
Sandra

## **Pastoral Coverage**

*In case of emergency, please contact the following:*

**Church office: 860-673-2796**

*or*

**Rev. Sandra Olsen:  
(860) 347-4100**

*or*

**Diaconate  
Chair,  
Cindy Nye:  
(517) 402-1000**

## **SANDRA'S OFFICE HOURS:**

*Tuesdays & Fridays:  
11:00 am-2:00 pm, and  
after church on Sundays  
until 2 pm.*

Feel free to drop by, or make an appointment by calling the church office or contacting Sandra: (860) 347-4100  
[sandraleeolsen@gmail.com](mailto:sandraleeolsen@gmail.com)

## **Deacon's Desk**

*"Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."*  
~Matthew 25:40

I have always liked the story of the prodigal son. It is very comforting to think of God as the loving, forgiving father welcoming his child home and celebrating his return. The older I get, the more fully I appreciate the significance of this. The father could have hardened his heart against his son, and turned him away to have to suffer the consequences of his actions. He must have felt sad and hurt by his son's sudden departure, but instead of holding this against him, he embraced him and rejoiced in their reunion. Despite how far the son had strayed or the mistakes he made, the father took him back in and offered him love and support. And it is particularly striking that the father greeted and showered him with love before the son even had a chance to apologize and ask for forgiveness: "his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him while he was still a long way off" (Luke 15: 20). It was the love that the father felt for him, not the son's remorse, that caused the father to welcome him with such joy.

Contrast that with the brother -- the older son who followed the rules and did all the right things and did not deviate from the path that had been laid out for him. He did not want to celebrate his brother's return, and could not understand the father's effusive greeting. He was very angry with the father for giving the brother a lavish welcome home, clearly feeling that he did not deserve this. It must have felt like a slap in the face, and an affront against the loyalty and responsibility he had shown his whole life. And he clearly felt hurt and jealous that his brother was seemingly being treated better than he thought he himself ever was: "All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!" (Luke 15:29-30). The father was quick to clarify that the welcome that he was extending to his wayward son did not take away at all from what the older brother would receive or was entitled to. It was not an act against him in any way, and had no bearing on the father's gratitude, love, or appreciation for him. The father's love and support and generosity were unconditional, not based on what either of his sons did or didn't do.

Sometimes in our own lives we might find ourselves getting caught up in the concept of "deserving." We are raised to believe that if we toe the line, follow the path, and do the "right things" we will be rewarded with a happy and prosperous life. The unspoken implication is that if we stray from that path in any way, then we shouldn't expect a positive outcome. By extension, if a person struggles or experiences hardship, there may be a presumption that they must have brought this on themselves, or failed in some way to follow the recipe for success. When that is the case our reflex might be to think that they don't deserve help, especially if -- like the older son -- we believe that grace extended to someone else takes something away from us.

So too does God's love sometimes get perceived: that it is earned by obedience and isn't deserved if we choose another way. We impose that view on ourselves and on others, and in doing so might harden our hearts against those who need love the most. But the parable of the prodigal son shows us that while it may be human nature to hold peoples' shortcomings against them, the Father knows only love and forgiveness. This has encouraged me to be mindful of whether, in my own life, I might get caught up in the same mindset as the older brother. Do I begrudge others the help that they receive if it seems they haven't "earned" it? Do I judge them for their position in life or the hardships they experience? Do I resent resources being put into programs and extended to people because I don't think they deserve it? In those moments, I find it helpful to reflect on Jesus' words in another parable: "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me" (Matthew 25: 35-36).

Our church periodically receives requests from people in the community asking for various types of assistance, which we always consider and try to accommodate as best we can. In recent months, I spoke with a woman who had been living in her car for quite some time after her hours at work were scaled back. She was familiar to me because the previous year, she had asked our church if we might be able to help her get her boyfriend's stepfather a large-print Bible for a Christmas gift. We were happy to oblige. This year her request was more substantial -- she had found a place that would be affordable for her to rent with others, but was having difficulty coming up with her portion of the security deposit.

As the economic disparities in our country intensify; the price of groceries, housing, and gas increase; and the systems in place to help the disadvantaged and underserved lose funding, it is likely that many more such requests will come our way. When the deacons engage in our deliberations about how best to meet these requests, I will call on God's grace and Jesus' words, that we might respond with the open heart of the father, not the hardened heart of his son.

~ Cindy Nye

## Prayer Concerns

Please contact the church office with prayer requests, thanksgivings, or remembrances to be included in the weekly notices.

## Transportation Ministry

Church Member Volunteers are always available to provide transportation to and from church. We encourage anyone who is in need of a ride to please contact Dayle Kane at (860) 404-5149 or [daykane@comcast.net](mailto:daykane@comcast.net)

## Want to be kept up-to-date?

## Get on our Church email list.

You will be notified of all the current news and upcoming happenings of our Church. You will not receive any junk mail or be bombarded with jokes or chain letters. It is a great and inexpensive way to be kept informed. If you are not on the list and would like to be, or if you have a prayer request or any other news to share, send an e-mail to: [jgebbby@sbcglobal.net](mailto:jgebbby@sbcglobal.net)

## Lenten Calendar

1. **Ash Wednesday Service:** Wednesday, March 5 at 7 PM in the Chapel.
2. **Palm/Passion Sunday:** Sunday, April 13 at 10 AM This service consists not only of the joyful waving of the palms, but also the raising of the cross as the Passion narrative is read.
3. **Maundy Thursday Service:** April 17 at 7 PM in the Sanctuary. This moving service includes the celebration of communion, a sermon and a reading of the various accounts of Jesus' passion, as he travels the road to his death on Golgotha. The service ends in complete darkness before the Christ candle is lit.
4. **Easter Sunday Service:** April 20 at 10 AM in the Sanctuary. Come join us for the joyous celebration of Jesus' resurrection.

## Lenten Studies

Join us for discussions of Scripture, art, and poetry in Sandra's office after Social Hour. All are welcome.

March 9: **Repentance:** Let's ponder the meaning of repentance by considering a poem, "Wild Geese" by Mary Oliver and Scripture, Mark 1: 9-15.

March 23: **Silence:** What does silence do for us?  
A Woman with a Pink Carnation by Rembrandt and Holy Island by Craigie Aitchison.  
Be still (or silent) and Know That I am God: Psalm 46: 10

March 30: **Priorities:** What does it mean to gain the whole world and forfeit one's life?  
"Blackwater Woods" by Mary Oliver and Scripture, Mark 8: 27-38

April 6: **Righteous Anger:** "Where Does the Temple Begin and Where Does It End?" by Mary Oliver and Scripture, John 2: 13-25

May 4: **The Joy of Grace:** "Some Questions You Might Ask" by Mary Oliver and Scripture, John 3: 14-21.



## Easter Lilies

For anyone wishing to donate an Easter lily for Easter Sunday, April 20, please complete a Floral Fund envelope by **Tuesday, April 15**, and submit to the church office or place in the Sunday morning offering plate. **The cost is \$9.** After Easter, the lilies will be brought to church members designated by Pastor Sandra. If you would like a plant to take home, please indicate so on the envelope. Thank you in advance for your support.



## Singing to Our Homebound Friends

**Sunday, April 13** after the Social Hour. Join us as we visit some of our church friends, who are homebound and unable to attend church. Both singers and our friends thoroughly enjoy the time!

## "Hello Spring" Luncheon

We will be having a potluck luncheon on Sunday, April 27, to celebrate Spring. Our theme will be salads of all kinds: tossed pasta, potato, egg, tuna, chicken, etc. Deacons will provide rolls/bread and drinks. Please look for the signup sheet in the Social Room.

## Thank You

We are very grateful to Reverend Carolyn Young for leading our worship while Sandra was away. We especially appreciate her flexibility in conducting the services on Zoom due to the Sunday snow storms, and we look forward to her being with us again. Thank you, Reverend Young! We are also very happy that Sandra had a safe and rewarding trip and are delighted to welcome her home.

## Cynthia Rollins Munsey 1932-2024

Cynthia Rollins Munsey, 92 years young, of Unionville, Connecticut, passed away on December 10, 2024, at Shady Oaks in Bristol. Cindy was the beloved mother of Scott Munsey, and Jennifer Dupont. Cindy was the daughter of Professor Willis Rollins and Eleanor (Sturtevant) Rollins. Cindy was the older sister to Diane Ekquist of Pennsylvania, and Leanne Valitsky of Unionville, Connecticut. Her two brothers-in-law Donald Ekquist of Pennsylvania, and Robert A. Valitsky of Unionville predeceased her. Cindy left her three beloved grandchildren Paul-Christopher, Curtis, and Julianne of Unionville, and her precious great grandsons Oliver and Grayson of Unionville, along with her nephew and nieces The family would like to thank Shady Oaks for their excellent care and love of Cindy. A longer obituary can be found on The Ahern Funeral Home website, <http://www.ahernfuneralhome.com>.

### **SMALL GROUP OPPORTUNITIES AT FCCU:**

#### **HSSS (High School Sunday Series)**

*A small group Bible study for high school and middle school age young people, following the Children's Moment in worship.*

*Meets at Dunkin Donuts in Unionville. Adult Leader: Tim Barth.*

#### **Frances Richards Club**

*Women's group. Meets the second Wednesday of the month (except January and February) for fellowship, special activities, and lunch. Contact Donna Williams: [pyroartist@sbcglobal.net](mailto:pyroartist@sbcglobal.net)*

#### **Men's Breakfast Club**

*Meets one Thursday a month. Contact Tim Barth: [tbarth525teb@sbcglobal.net](mailto:tbarth525teb@sbcglobal.net)*

#### **Bell Choir**

*Wednesday evenings at 7:00 p.m. (except July and August). Directed by Lisa Durkin: [usnavynurs@aol.com](mailto:usnavynurs@aol.com)*

**New small groups are welcome and encouraged. To begin one, contact the church office.**

## *Mission Trip*

The Farmington Valley Association of the SNEC of the UCC is sponsoring a mission trip August 2 - 7 this summer in Farmington, Maine, doing home repair work. You can learn more about this at [missionattheeastward.org](http://missionattheeastward.org). The mission is open to anyone ages 14 and older. The approximate cost will be \$150 per person, which includes home-cooked meals and housing at the conference center. If you are interested in participating in the mission trip, please contact Rev. Zack Mabe at Terryville Congregational Church [zackmabe@hotmail.com](mailto:zackmabe@hotmail.com) or 860 589-0182.

## *Walk Against Hunger*

From Suzy Rivera:

It is time to SOAR together and make a difference in attacking Hunger Insecurity head on. But, I cannot do it alone. Please consider making a financial donation to [Suzy's Walk Page](#) by clicking on the link and then the green DONATE button on the left. Or, you can mail me at [srivera@fsc-ct.org](mailto:srivera@fsc-ct.org) OR call me at 860-801-8603 and we will figure it out!

I will be SOARing at the Walk Against Hunger on **April 26, 2025** at Dunkin Park in Hartford, CT to combat hunger and food insecurity at the Friendship Service Center, Inc. in New Britain where I spend my days! Statistics abound, but what I see is that food insecurity devastatingly impacts a lot of people including children, veterans, older folks ... basically a lot of folks who do not have enough to funds to buy food or have to make choices to buy food, pay their rent, purchase clothing ... the list is too long when income is limited.

It is a part of my faith journey as I dream of a world filled with peace with justice where no one goes to bed hungry ... or even wondering where their meals will come from tomorrow! If you are already Walking ... if you have already donated to me or someone else ... THANK YOU for SOARing!

One of my favorite quotes right now is "*It always seems impossible until it is done.*" - Nelson

*Mandela.* Hunger may be big, but I believe together, we CAN make a difference. I deeply appreciate your support!

## *Small Angels Ministry*

We continue to partner with St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Terryville to provide diapers, baby formula, baby food, wipes, etc., for families in need. Please bring any such items to church to donate, or write a check to the church if you are unable to purchase them yourself. Susan Keenan goes to St. Paul's once a month to assist.

## *Mailing Update*

We are in the process of updating our list of people who receive the weekly church service documents in the mail. If you currently receive these and wish to continue, please call the church office or send an email to [fccuunionville@att.net](mailto:fccuunionville@att.net). The phone number is 860-673-2796.

## Sanctuary/Chapel Etiquette

Please continue to limit talking while Michael is playing for us. **The Prelude is a time of contemplation and preparation for the service.** Socializing in our worship spaces disrupts this for people in attendance, and interferes with Zoom participants' ability to hear and enjoy the music. Please try to finish conversations in the Social Room or Narthex before entering the Sanctuary or Chapel. **At the end of the service, please feel free to exit quietly during the Postlude if you do not wish to stay and listen.**

## Building Use

Remember to be aware of the classes and other groups meeting throughout the building, especially the **yoga classes held in the Social Room on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9:15 to 10:45 am.** Meetings are listed in our weekly bulletin. Additional times may be scheduled as classes are added or changed. If you are not sure if an area is being used, please call the church office to inquire, and be cautious about going into rooms that might be occupied. Thank you for staying out of these areas during those times, and also for being considerate about noise levels in the building while classes or groups are meeting.



## Committee and Club Updates

**Men's Breakfast Club** will get together next on Thursday, March 27 and April 24, 9:00 a.m. at Uncle Bob's Ham and Eggers in Plainville.

**Frances Richards Club:** The club meets on the second Wednesday of each month during the Spring and Fall from 12 – 2 pm in the Social Room. Please bring your own lunch. Beverages and dessert are provided. In addition to lunch, we usually have a brief meeting and a program. All ladies are welcome.

Flowers on the altar in January were in memory of Frances Richards who began the club in the 1930's. She was quite active in our church and also the head of the Sunday School for many years.

This was the 4th year that the F. R. Club hosted a "Sock Drive" in January. Three years ago we collected 60 pairs of socks; 2 years ago we collected 80 pairs; last year we collected 85 pairs; and this year we collected **160 pairs!** In early February, the socks were delivered to The Friendship Service Center in New Britain. Thank you all for your kindness and warm donations!

The club will resume meeting again **Wednesday, March 12th** for some social time and Bingo. On April 9th, Pastor Sandra and Susan Keenan will share their experiences of their recent Fall hike to Camino. Hope to see you all at our next gathering. Please see Donna Williams with any questions.

**Church Committee** meets next Monday, March 17 and April 21, 7:00 pm, in the Chapel.

**Deacons** meet next Monday, March 3 and April 7 at 7:00 pm via Zoom.

**Trustees** meet next Thursday, March 27 and May 1, at 6:30 pm at George's.

**Finance Committee:** The annual budget meeting was held on January 19, and the 2025 plan was approved. Thank you to Jill Kovalich for leading the meeting. The 2025 budget is tracking close to projections. Any variances are related to timing with the exception of electric. A new charge called FMCC is now incorporated in the monthly electric bill. This is an unexpected, federally mandated item which costs approximately \$75 monthly and \$900 annually.

There is no updated information about the Verizon cell tower contract. Verizon is obligated to pay us at the current rate through February of 2026 unless we reach a new agreement with help from our attorney

**Missions and Outreach:** During January, the Francis Richards Club collected 160 pairs of socks which were donated to The Friendship Service Center. This is a new record, and one our church can celebrate! In March, Missions and Outreach will provide the names and ages of children needing Easter baskets. The baskets will be due in the Social Room by Palm Sunday, April 13, so that they can be delivered to Covenant to Care in time for Easter.

As always, Missions would like to thank the congregation for their continuing generous support. Suggestions for new projects are always welcome.

## Grocery Store Gift Cards



Purchase gift cards for Stop & Shop, Big Y, or Shop Rite, and buy your groceries as you normally would.

**It costs you nothing extra!** Our church receives 5% of the amount of the gift cards that the congregation purchases. **You may purchase cards from Malcolm in the Social Room after church, or send an email to the church office to make other arrangements: [fccunionville@att.net](mailto:fccunionville@att.net)**

### *Social Hour*

Please consider signing up to help with our Social Hour. This entails putting out the snacks, making the coffee and then cleaning up at the end. There are plenty of pre-packaged snacks to use, or you may bring in something else of your choosing. The sign-up sheet is in the Social Room. This is also a great way to get to know another church member, if you would like to pair up with someone else

JOIN US FOR  
**Social  
HOUR**

### *Get Involved!*

**Hospitality Team** is open to those who want to provide a warm welcome to all who come for worship and fellowship. If you'd like to be part of this team, call Russ Sylvester at (860) 678-9474.

**Choir** provides the uplifting anthems we hear in worship each week, and is open to all who wish to praise God through the gift of music. To learn more or offer your gifts of music and singing, contact Music Director Michael Korman or drop by for rehearsal any Sunday morning before Worship.

**Handbell Choir** needs more musicians to continue to bring their beautiful songs to our special services. Practices are Wednesday nights at 7 pm in the Conference Room, September through June.

**Cleaning:** We can always use more assistance with keeping our space beautiful. Please email the church office if you can help in any way, either regularly or occasionally/as needed. **We could really use some help with vacuuming the church once every three weeks. Please see Tim if you are interested.**

**Special Events:** Throughout the year, we have a number of events and activities that would greatly benefit from extra volunteers. These include our concerts and clean-up activities. Please consider asking how you can help when you see an event that you're interested in being a part of.

**Transportation:** We have several members who regularly need rides to church on Sundays, as well as some with more occasional transportation needs for special events. Please consider adding your name to our list of drivers. You may do so by contacting Dayle Kane: (860) 404-5149 or [daykane@comcast.net](mailto:daykane@comcast.net)

**\*\*If an unanticipated transportation need arises on the morning of a service, please call Susan Keenan (860) 690-1350 or Cindy Nye (517) 402-1000 for assistance. Please try to call by 9 am so they have time to find a ride for you.**



