



The Trumpet

Genesee Valley Association
New York Conference
United Church of Christ

March 2, 2016

Important Dates Coming Up!

MARCH 7

UCC YEARBOOK FORMS ARE DUE. On March 7th at midnight the Data Hub closes for churches to enter Yearbook information. This is crucial information for churches to fill out in order to maintain current records with the United Church of Christ. If you have any questions please contact Gloria Halko at profiles@uccny.org.

MARCH 28

REGISTRATION ENDS for the New York Women of the UCC 2016 Annual Conference. The conference will be held at the Watson Homestead Conference and Retreat Center in Painted Post, NY, April 28-30. More inside.

APRIL 16

GVA SPRING ASSEMBLY will be held at Mt. Rise UCC. Worship will start at 10 a.m. and include lunch and a workshop on technology in worship. New officers and committee members will be installed and the assembly is scheduled to conclude by 2 p.m. More inside.

APRIL 17

REGISTRATION ENDS for the congregational development workshop "From Membership to Discipleship" at Henrietta UCC on April 23 from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. The workshop will be led by acclaimed author and church coach Phil Maynard, author of several books on congregational development. More inside.

JUNE 10 – 12

NEW YORK CONFERENCE ANNUAL MEETING will meet at the Hyatt-Regency Rochester, 125 E Main St. Friday, June 10, to Sunday, June 12.



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Moderator's Moment – March 2016

I confess that when I heard our gathering of GVA clergy would be talking about "governance" in February I rolled my eyes. What could *possibly* be more boring than discussing bylaws, documentation, and church councils?! We all understand that there is a "business" side to ministry, but did we have to sit in on a lecture about it?

Here is another confession: The 90 minute discussion facilitated by Ryan Henderson was riveting. Honest! The time flew by. The core of the conversation was, "Where is God in the day to day workings of our ministry?" Do we open our meetings with prayer? If so, then is that prayer inviting us into God's presence or is it a not-so-subtle warning for everyone to behave and stick to the agenda? When searching for the next pastor, are we adhering to standard Human Resource practices or discerning the will of God? I think you get the gist of it.

The Executive Council of the GVA continues to gently draft revisions of our Partnership Structure document (for those of you wondering, it's the document that guides our association policies and practices). The conversation about "governance" provided a reminder that even this fairly dry process is God's work; approaching it as such has breathed God's Spirit into our midst and that is exciting!

I ask those of you reading this note to examine your many committee and administrative tasks and if God is on the periphery, invite God into the center of your ministry and let the blessings fall.

Peace, Steven Price, GVA Moderator

WEB DESIGN OPPORTUNITY

Mountain Rise UCC is seeking proposals for the redesign of the church website this spring. Proposals should include a detailed plan and project schedule, as well as qualifications and current references for similar work. The church system is Mac-based and a budget of \$3,500 has been allocated for the project. For additional information, visit <http://nebula.wsimg.com/7cd770fe17fe9b07aa3dd37ceee07789?AccessKeyId=E11B385342FA42214E53&disposition=0&alloworigin=1>

CHURCH WEBSITE CORNER

A church's website is the first thing people see when they are seeking a new church these days. How does yours look? As the communications coordinator for GVA, I visit your websites each month to see what is happening at your church. Quite a few of the sites are outdated, listing events from 2014 or even last year.

It is hard to find the resources to keep a website updated but it is no longer a luxury for a church who wants to invite new people to visit. So, if you have a website but not many resources to keep it current, consider taking all the dated information off the site and just leave the basic church information: location, service times, history or other description of who you are. Be sure people don't write you off because your website is out of date.



LET'S TALK VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL!

In the next issue, let's share information on what has worked and not worked with VBS in our churches. UCC of Castile gets the prize for announcing the first VBS for this year, a one-day event from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturday, July 30. Please share your experience and plans for VBS with your colleagues in the next issue. Send to gvaucc@gmail.com. I look forward to a great sharing of information. Thanks! Diane Ellis, Communications Coordinator.

FEEDING THE HOMELESS

Congratulations to the Youth Group of First Congregational United Church of Christ in Fairport and to Mountain Rise UCC for stepping up to volunteer to provide meals for guests at the REACH Home Homeless Shelter at 80 Prince Street in Rochester. Churches are invited to provide a hot, hearty meal any of the seven days a week the shelter is open.



Meals are still needed on April 1, 10, 14, 19, 29, and 30.

Churches interested in serving this program should plan enough food for 60 people. Dinner is served at 5:30 p.m. and volunteers are asked to arrive in time to set up and serve by that time. The serving and eating take approximately a half hour and time should also be scheduled for clean-up. Contact Bridget Carey for more information at 585.747.8836 (call or text) or bcarey128@gmail.com.

FROM MEMBERSHIP TO DISCIPLESHIP: GVA OCWM EVENT

Henrietta UCC will host a congregational development workshop “From Membership to Discipleship” on April 23 from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. The workshop will be led by acclaimed author and church coach Phil Maynard, author of several books on congregational development.

Topics to be covered include how to identify catalysts and build relationships that lead to spiritual growth, the dimensions of discipleship and how to support people in their growth as disciples, and how to build an intentional discipleship process for personal and congregational transformation. The cost is \$25 per individual. Churches with five or more attendees may pay \$100. The cost includes lunch, a workbook for each participant and a complimentary copy of the book *Membership to Discipleship: Growing Maturing Disciples Who Make Disciples* by Phil Maynard. Deadline for registration is April 17. To Register for Henrietta Workshop: [Click Here](#). For more information, contact Rev. Freeman Palmer, Associate Conference Minister for Congregational Development at freemanpalmer@uccny.org.

FACTS YOU DON'T WANT TO KNOW:

Rochester is ranked No. 1 of similarly-sized cities for "extreme poverty" at 16.2% according to a 2015 report by the Rochester Area Community Foundation and its ACT Rochester initiative. Rochester now has more people living at less than half the federal poverty level than any other similarly-sized city in the U.S. Another unfortunate distinction: Rochester is now the only city of its size where slightly more than half of children live in poverty. Only three major U.S. cities have higher child poverty rates — Detroit, Cleveland and Dayton, Ohio.

Spotlight on a Program and Mission Support (PAMS) Grant Recipient

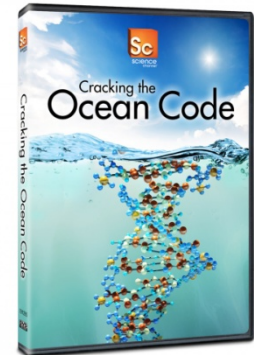
Twelve agencies are being supported in 2016 by grants from the Genesee Valley Association of UCC, with funds that come from GVA member churches. One of them is Cameron Community Ministries which provides youth programming to give at risk children the tools necessary to fight for a better, more successful future. GVA funding also helped to secure food that made it possible for the organization to continue serving free, nutritious meals to the community in need. Along with feeding people physically, Cameron will continue to give people resources that feed their souls, and are planning to expand to offer parenting classes and a GED program. For more information visit: <http://www.cameronministries.org/home0.aspx>.

Calendar of Events

Please be sure to send information on your church's events to gvaucc@gmail.com

March 7 – Meeting at 5:30 p.m. at Irondequoit UCC to discuss participation in this year's Pride Parade and/or the Image Out Film Festival as ways of informing the community that some of our UCC churches are Open and Affirming (ONA). Some new ideas are being researched and will be presented at the meeting.

March 8 - Living in Harmony with God's World will meet on Tuesday, March 8 at 7 pm at Henrietta UCC for a program on "Cracking the Ocean Code," a documentary exploring new life forms and genetic secrets in the ocean that could help solve the planet's most urgent energy and climate challenges. From Nova Scotia to the Galapagos Islands to Antarctica, Dr. J. Craig Venter embarks on a mission to map the DNA of every microscopic organism in the ocean. Living in Harmony is an interfaith environmental group that meets at Henrietta UCC. All interested persons are invited to attend. For more information, contact Elizabeth Pixley, convener (eypixley@gmail.com or 334-0977).



March 10 – "Meals & Memories," a community outreach program of UCC at Castile Women's Fellowship Group will be held from 12 noon to 2 p.m. at the church, 4 Washington Street in Castile. The theme is women in the Bible.

March 12 – The Deep Wells Parenting Conference will be held from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the Koinonia Fellowship, 500 Main Street in East Rochester. Workshop topics will include large families, sibling rivalry, children's ministry, the reality of bullying, parenting toddlers and preschoolers, and preparing your teen for transition to independence. Cost is \$10 for an individual, \$15 for a couple. Breakfast and lunch will be provided. Access a complete conference schedule and register online at www.parentingconference.org.

* Union Congregational UCC in Churchville will hold its annual Ham Dinner from 4:00 to 6:30 p.m. at the church, 14 N. Main Street in Churchville. The church will be serving ham, scalloped potatoes, carrots, green beans, baked pineapple, applesauce and cake. Cost is \$10 for adults, \$5 for children ages 5-12, and free for children under 5.

March 13 - Interfaith IMPACT of New York State presents "Death with Dignity: Compassionate or Unethical?" from 2 to 4:30 p.m. at First Unitarian Church, 220 S. Winton Road. Speakers include Corinne Carey, NYS Campaign Director, Compassion & Choice; Diane Coleman, President and CEO, Not Dead Yet; JJ Hanson, President of the Patients Rights Action Fund; Dr. Timothy Quill, Thomas and Georgia Gosnell Distinguished Professor in Palliative Care at the U of R School of Medicine and Dentistry. More information at 442-5111.

* Daylight Savings Time Begins

March 17 – GVA clergy colloquium will meet at 10- a.m. at First Congregational Church at Spencerport, 65 Church Street to discuss the Easter texts.

* Labyrinth Walk at First Unitarian Church, 220 South Winton in Rochester from 7 to 9 p.m. Open to all.



Calendar of Events continued

March 23 – Exploring the Paradoxes of Mourning, A Seminar for Caregivers, will be led by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D., author, educator, and grief counselor. Registration begins at 8:30 and the program is from 9 a.m. to noon at the Country Club of Rochester, 2935 East Avenue. The seminar is sponsored by Anthony Funeral and Cremation Chapels and Lifetime Care. The event is free, but seating is limited, Registration is required by March 15 to Lifetime Care, 3111 Winton Road South. More information at www.centerforloss.com.

March 25 – Registration due for the Navigating the Closing Call workshop which will be held on April 8 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Asbury First United Methodist, 1050 East Avenue. The Pastoral Counseling and Family Therapy Group is offering this program which includes two workshops on changing identity and changing relationships. The cost is \$40 per person. Register by sending a check made out to Mental Health Counseling Group (MHCG) and mailing it to Lynn Acquafondata, Pastoral Counseling & Family Therapy Group, Building 4, Suite 200, 2000 South Winton Rd., Rochester, NY 14618. For more information call Lynn at 585-330-1340 or email her at RevLynn@Congogram.com.

March 27 - Union Congregational (UCC) in Hall will be host an ecumenical Easter Sunrise Service at the historic Little Church cemetery at 6:45 a.m. Any GVA church that is included in the Marcus Whitman Council of Churches is welcome to attend.

March 29 – Stanley I. Stuber worship service at 10:30 a.m. with Dr. Leonard Sweet preaching and at 1:30 p.m. Dr. Sweet lectures on “Life’s Three Ages.” At Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School (CRCDS). www.crcds.edu

March 30 – J.C. Wynn worship service at 10:30 a.m. with Dr. Amy Hanson preaching and at 1:30 p.m. Dr. Hanson lectures on “Reaching and Unleashing Baby Boomers and Beyond.” At 7:30 p.m. the documentary “Gen Silent- the LGBT Aging Film” will be screened with discussion to follow. All events are at CRCDS. www.crcds.edu

March 31 – African-American Legacy Worship Service at 10:30, community luncheon at noon, and African-American Legacy Lecture at 1:30 p.m. with Dr. Dorothy Smith-Ruiz lecturing on “Contemporary African American Grandmothers: Primary Caregivers and Conveyors of Traditional Family Values.” All events are at CRCDS. www.crcds.edu

April 2 – Henrietta UCC will host Chicago Men's A Cappella at the church with the concert beginning at 7:30 p.m. Their repertoire includes baroque and renaissance works for men's voices, along with rousing sea shanties & drinking songs. To learn more about CMAC, check out this link: <http://www.cmacsings.com/recordings/video/>.

April 7 – 9 - Spring Rummage Sale at Castile UCC, 4 Washington St., Castile. The event will run on Thurs., April 7 from 6 to 8 p.m.; on Fri., April 8 from 12 noon to 4 p.m., and on Sat., April 9 from 9 to 11 a.m. For more information, contact Marlene Loomis at 585-493-2840.

April 9 – A 25th anniversary celebration at the Annual Advent House Dinner Dance and Auction at Monroe Golf Club from 6:00 p.m. until midnight. This is one of our major fundraisers that helps to meet the expenses of providing "no- cost" care to our residents and their families. If you are interested in attending or making a donation of goods for the auction or placing an advertisement for the booklet, please call Advent House at 223-6112 for further information.

People News

- Rev. James Morasco is the new minister at the United Church of Christ at Morganville.
 - Harrison Putnam, minister at the United Church of Christ in Castile, will be installed on Sunday, April 3 at 3:00 p.m.
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NEW YORK WOMEN OF THE UCC 2016 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Registration ends March 28 for the New York Women of the UCC 2016 Annual Conference, to be held at the Watson Homestead Conference and Retreat Center in Painted Post, NY, April 28-30. Keynote Speaker & Preacher: Rev. Marraine Kettell - NY Conference Coordinator of Local Church Ministries and Pastor of First Congregational Corning UCC, will be the keynote speaker and preacher. Dr. Marsha William, Associate Conference Minister for Clergy and Authorized Ministry Concerns for the New York Conference, will lead a Sacred Conversation on Race, and Rev. Jan Mahle will lead Bible Studies.

Workshops will include “The Joy of Photography,” “The Green Bible,” “A Time for Every Matter Under Heaven (Loss, Transition, Change),” and “Starting Homeless Ministries at Your Church.” For more information go to <http://www.uccny.org/ministries/women-of-ny-conference/> or contact Melva Victorino – melva130@optonline.net. For registration contact Sue Frost – uccnywomen@gmail.com. All church women are invited. Please register by March 28th.



Volunteer to Show our GVA Hospitality!

Volunteers are needed for the fifty-third Annual Meeting of the New York Conference of the United Church of Christ at the Hyatt-Regency Rochester, 125 E Main St, Rochester Friday, June 9, to Sunday, June 12. Opportunities are listed below.

- 1) **NEEDED:** One person who **LOVES** working with children to support childcare director during the Annual Meeting. Room and Board covered by New York Conference. Qualifications: Strong desire to make a difference in the lives of families with kids attending annual meeting; ability to be flexible to accommodate needs of kids and/or director; verification of Safe Church training and a cleared background check. If interested contact Marcia Tolman at Ebenezer UCC at [716.674.4566](tel:716.674.4566) by April 3, 2016.
- 2) Volunteer to be Guy/Gal Friday for guest speakers! Send note of interest to pjcannon@aol.com
- 3) Have a big heart and/or big hug? Bring it to Conference and welcome those arriving on Friday or Saturday! Send interest to pjcannon@aol.com

What's New at the Resource Center

These are some of the newest additions to the Resource Center. Visit the online catalog at <http://pbygenval.org/about-us/missions-ministries/resource-center/line-catalog/>. For more information on the Resource Center visit <http://pbygenval.org/about-us/missions-ministries/resource-center/>.



A LONG LETTING GO: MEDITATIONS ON LOSING SOMEONE YOU LOVE by McEntyre, Marilyn

This beautiful volume of reflections by Marilyn Chandler McEntyre is for family members and friends who are doing the life-changing work of accompanying someone on the final stretch of his or her journey.

WALKING WITH JESUS THROUGH THE OLD TESTAMENT: DEVOTIONS FOR LENT by Stroble, Paul

On a seven mile journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus, the resurrected Jesus captivated two travelers with stories from the Old Testament pointing to his life and death. Walking with Jesus through the Old Testament invites readers to embark on this journey with Christ throughout the Lenten season.

SEARCHING FOR HAPPINESS: HOW GENEROSITY, FAITH, AND OTHER SPIRITUAL HABITS CAN LEAD TO A FULL LIFE by Thielen, Martin

Happiness, Thielen argues, does not come from external factors like getting a job promotion or finally reaching your goal weight. Rather, happiness is an "inside" job. In brief, easy-to-read chapters, Thielen offers ten traits of happy and fulfilled people.

AMERICA'S ORIGINAL SIN: RACISM, WHITE PRIVILEGE, AND THE BRIDGE TO A NEW AMERICA by Wallis, Jim

In America's Original Sin, Wallis offers a prophetic and deeply personal call to action in overcoming the racism so ingrained in American society. He speaks candidly to Christians—particularly white Christians—urging them to cross a new bridge toward racial justice and healing.

CREATIVE CHURCH HANDBOOK: RELEASING THE POWER OF THE ARTS IN YOUR CONGREGATION by McElroy, J. Scott

Now is the time for the church to reclaim its role as a center of creativity. Among your members are artists, musicians and other creatives whose gifts can enhance your worship, inform your theology and impact your community. Christian arts advocate J. Scott McElroy gives a comprehensive vision and manual for unleashing creativity in your congregation.

START BECOMING A GOOD SAMARITAN by Ortberg, John Zodervan

This DVD features John Ortberg hosting six emotionally packed sessions featuring Christian leaders like Eugene Peterson, Philip Yancey, Matthew Sleeth, Jim Cymbala, Chuck Colson, Joni Eareckson Tada, Rob Bell and many others. The Becoming a Good Samaritan Participant Guide will help you explore issues like poverty, social injustice, pandemic diseases, the environment – and teach you how to start making a personal, street-level impact today. Inside are discussion questions, radical but commonsense ideas, and personal applications to help you live out your faith in ways that will change the community around you.



Lenten Activities Continue at Our Churches

United Church of Bristol offers a Soup Supper Speaker Series with Canandaigua historian Ray Henry on March 2 presenting on the mystery of the origins of the Seneca nation in Ontario Co.) and with Pic Schade and Lynn Hamlin Minderman on March 9 telling stories of outreach to students in Lesotho, southern Africa. Suppers start at 6 pm; presentations at 6:30.

Lenten Activities continued

UCC at Castile has a Lenten Bible Study Series “Soup & Scriptures” from noon to 1 p.m. at the church on March 2, 9, and 16. Participants should bring a lunch and Bible.

Community Christian Church will have two meetings at 10 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. to explore Progressive Christianity using the Phoenix Affirmations, on March 8 and March 22.

Union Congregational UCC in Churchville is participating in an ecumenical Soup and Bread Study Series with Union Congregational hosting on Thursday, March 3. The March 10 session will be held at St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church in Churchville, and the last two sessions, March 17s and 23, will be hosted by the United Methodist Church in Churchville. The supper begins at 6:30 and study session at 7:15.

First Congregational at Fairport has a Wednesday Lenten Devotional discussions at 11 a.m. at the church on March 2, 9, and 16. In addition, the church will welcome Dr. Timothy Dwyer to explore what the bible says about suffering at 7 p.m. on Monday evenings, March 7, 14, and 21. He will be speaking on “Suffering in Isaiah,” “Suffering in the Psalms,” and “Suffering and the Death of Jesus.” Jesus’ Family Tree will be explored by Jim Stewart during March 6 and 13 Sunday morning services at 10:45 a.m. at the First Congregational UCC in Fairport. The talks will explore the differences in how Jesus’ ancestry is portrayed in different scriptures.

Conversations with God Bible study at Henrietta UCC are Tuesday evenings from 7 to 8:30 p.m. at the church until March 22. The group discusses events or situations in our world and in our individual lives and seeks to understand how God speaks to us through scripture. Drop-ins are welcome. For more information contact Duane Bartz (518-368-4664).

Immanuel UCC in Ontario offers a Lenten Study Time with bag lunch stand alone sessions on Wednesday from 12 noon to 1 p.m. March 2, 9 and 16.

“Questions of Faith” at Parma Greece UCC will feature viewing and discussing of this video series following a supper of homemade soup and bread on March 9 and 16 beginning at 6 p.m.

First Congregational Church of Spencerport will host three more Lenten Dinners in March, beginning at 6 p.m. March 2 will focus on Building Minds in South Sudan with Mathon Noi and Judy Schwartz providing an update on progress made with the schools. March 9 will feature Walker Brother Funeral Home to discuss how to make final preparations, and a corned beef and cabbage meal will end the series on March 16 with Kay Woike from Global Ministries sharing about the various ministries with which the church is involved.

Please share your church news with GVA by sending to gvaucc@gmail.com Thanks!



First Congregational Church at Spencerport sent out a Time and Talent form to congregants last year as part of their 2016 Stewardship Program, asking people how they might support the church. People responded with interest in supporting the church in the following ways: building repairs, retired group, building monitor, food pantry, Salem Food Kitchen, video/sound support, chaperones, nursery, choir, Needles mission, missions, fundraisers, yard work, pastoral relations, transportation, set up/breakdown, library, history, elevator, website, Women’s Guild and polishing brass.

Church News continued

UCC Congregational Church in Webster has been offering a Vacation Bible School type program for children on Sunday mornings which continues through March 20. The program includes Bible lessons and challenges to live out faith, as well as drama, crafts, cooking, science and mission projects. On March 25 from 9 a.m. to 12 noon, the children in pre-school through grade three may attend a Good Friday Camp at the church. Activities will include interactive storytelling, cooking and snack, Easter egg hunt, games and crafts. Cost is \$10 per camper.

The Salem Nutrition Center, at Salem UCC, 60 Bittner Street, Rochester is looking for a new Director. This is a volunteer position to be filled by September of this year. The volunteer director will provide strategic and operational leadership, facilitate planning activities, and represent the organization in the community. For additional information, contact: Nick McClain (Interim Director) at nickymcclain@gmail.com, Ann Spargo (Co-Chairperson) at aspargo@rochester.rr.com or Carol Zimmer (Co-Chairperson) at carolazimmer1@gmail.com.

First Congregational UCC in Fairport is seeking a Director of Christian Education to direct the church school, promote and publicize Christian Education events; coordinate Adult Education; coordinate the youth group; facilitate a yearly youth mission trip and other program/events. This is a part-time position, approximately 20 hours per week with support of committees and presence required on Sunday mornings. Salary is \$12,000-\$18,000 depending on experience. To apply, send resume to contactus.fairportucc@gmail.com or mail to 26 East Church Street, Fairport NY 14450. Job description is available upon request.

First Congregational UCC in Fairport is also seeking a Wedding Coordinator which will be paid through fees from couples. The position will need to be available to meet with couples, attend their rehearsal and the wedding. For more information, please contact the church office at contactus.fairportucc@gmail.com.



New York Conference Mission to Nicaragua a Great Success Report by Margie Price-Watrobski

In January nine representatives from churches around the state (Rochester, Syracuse, New York City, and Long Island), travelled to Managua, Nicaragua to meet with Misión Cristiana, the denomination we have had a partnership with for more than 20 years. We met with them, in part, to discuss opportunities for future mission trips.

In the seven days we spent with our friends in Misión Cristiana we had the opportunity to help add a second floor to accommodate the growing after school program at first church and met some of the teachers and children of this program. We visited some tourist spots around the capital city, as well as 29th church to see how the church is using an alternate fuel source with their Biogas stoves, and creating a sustainable seed sharing program for local villagers to plant their crops. A pick-up game of soccer we had with the children at 29th church was a personal highlight for me!

Plans are already under way for a spring trip next year. There will be mission opportunities for many different ages and abilities with things like planting trees, helping with construction on another church, helping out in one of the school programs, or even fund raising opportunities to help finance their ongoing renovations. Many of us who made this trip will be on hand at the Annual Meeting in June and would love to share our experience with you and answer any questions you may have.



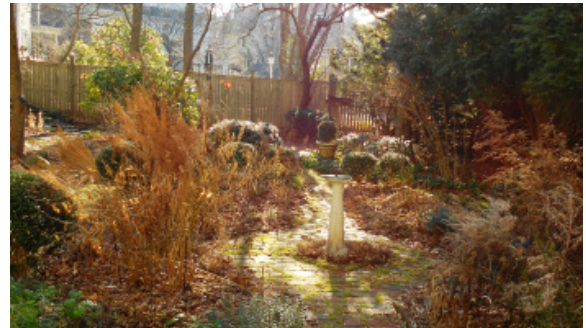
The Reflections column is a place where you can share your thoughts with others or tell people about something you have experienced that has made you think. Thanks to Rev. Tim Hamlin of Bristol and Rev. David Inglis of Henrietta for providing us with their thoughts this month. Please send your reflection to gvaucc@gmail.com.

From Tim Hamlin: There's a cute little word play with "fallow" and "follow" that I'm trying to resist because it sounds nauseatingly like fundamentalist vacation Bible school. But if I take "follow" to mean "following my muse" or "following my bliss" perhaps I can stomach it. I've been traversing a fairly solitary, if not lonely, landscape in recent months. My urge has often been to "fix" it...to alleviate the pain by joining, meeting, engaging, and embracing. But I wonder if I'd be missing a deeper invitation. Is it possible that this "fallowness"...this putative wasteland of solitude is, in truth, a rich loam of creativity? I am so lightning quick to try to fill a void, a silence, a lull, that it may require solitude the size of the Sahara Desert for me to finally settle in to it.

I'm like a pilot of a 747 who can't drop down onto just any old 2200 foot runway meant for a Piper Cub. I need a vast expanse upon which to "lay my burdens down." I have to come in slow and long and circle a few times before I can even begin to trust the width and breadth of the vacancy that beckons me to touch down...and perhaps touch deep.

Once I AM in the wilderness ("I Am"?), I feel the need to reconnoiter – mostly to make sure there isn't some delicious distraction to sink my teeth into, some spiritual equivalent of Starbucks around the next corner. Only when I make the initially sad discovery that there ISN'T, can I settle into the barrenness, and begin to listen – not to what's without, but to what's within, what is gifted to hear.

My vegetable garden looks pretty bleak and barren by this point in the year. There is the carnage of the previous season: bits of carrots unearthed by desperate rodents, battered garlic stems, and pieces of moldy bread rudely tossed out the back door when the compost bin was too encased in snow to bother. It doesn't make for a pretty picture when the fateful day comes that I fire up my little rototiller and begin the long, ponderous journey from the garden shed to the garden – a trip I could clock with a calendar. (What the little Troy-Bilt lacks in speed it makes up for with menacing determination!)



I wonder if my interior "garden" has anything comparable to a rototiller – something to chew up the substrate to make it more receptive to seeds of growth. Something to break apart the hardened surface to allow deeper life. As terrified as I am to even suggest it, perhaps my spiritual "rototiller" is – God help me! – suffering. Is that what cracks the surface?

I've often said that we folks are much richer, deeper and kinder once life has knocked our edges off...once we've been tenderized by adversity. Each Spring, when I finish my sumo wrestling session with the Troy-Bilt, I'm sweaty...and the garden is soft. It's pliable and willing. Of course, once it's tilled, it's also open to all sorts of growth...not just the stuff I want to eat. Red root, dandelions, orchard grass, weeds!

Reflections continued

Desolation AND suffering, then, are necessary but not sufficient conditions for growth. Discernment is needed as well - a selective process whereby the desired growth is guarded and the undesired growth is yanked.

Living deeply into the desolate parts of life is no easy matter. Our sympathetic nervous system is more than happy to lead us - not necessarily into temptation, but at least into titillation. There's always something to wrap our hands or minds around, to keep us out of that untilled patch of seemingly worthless real estate. "Come around front!," we hear, "Where all the action is...and take a dip in the teeming pool of people, places and plans!"

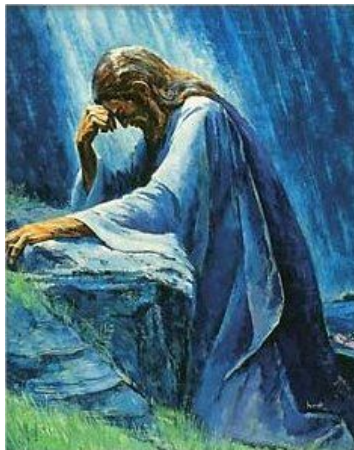
It's a lot harder to stay in the backyard where nothing much seems to be happening. I know myself only well enough to know that I can't remain in the backyard long without someone else there beside me - not to distract or engage me. But someone just to be there, with the grit and faith to believe that even in the bleak, blank dirt...God is there too. Maybe we can wait there together...

From David Inglis: Easter Hope

Before this month is over, we'll be celebrating the triumph and joy of Easter (March 27). We can't help but associate that with the coming of spring, new life, and longer, warmer days. Halleluia!

But Easter's hope goes a lot deeper than the weather. Easter breaks through the darkness that persistently casts its shadow over us and our world. It's the darkness of self-serving power that silences the opposition by crosses, brutality, prisons, humiliation, or intimidation. It's the darkness of hypocrisy that puts the righteous on trial, blames the victim, scapegoats the outcast, and judges without self-reflection. It is the darkness of betrayal, denial, and desertion when the stakes are high and righteousness is risky. It is the darkness of death, despair, mortality, powerlessness, cynicism, and resignation.

These are things that are difficult to think about because they are so painful. But we can't ever shake their hold on us, because they keep appearing in our daily newsfeed, in the stories of betrayal, injustice and suffering of people we know, and in the reminders of our weakness and mortality in the face of life's fragility.



Easter is so powerful to me because Easter answers all of this darkness without evading any of it. The story of Jesus' last days is called the Passion. The word comes from the Latin *pati*, which means to suffer or endure pain. I see the Passion story encompassing so many kinds of human suffering. It includes physical, emotional and spiritual agony. It includes personal, relational, and collective loss. It takes us through the things we fear the most—defeat, despair and death. Whatever shadows darken our own path, we can see that darkness depicted in this story of Jesus' humiliation, suffering and death.

The Good News of Easter is that darkness and death did not and do not have the last word. There is a Light that can dispel the deepest darkness and transform it into the dawn of hope. Darkness in all its forms are transcended and overcome by God's Light, Life, and Love. They are invincible.

So as we complete our Lenten journey to Easter this month, I really encourage you to let the *whole* story speak to you. Follow Jesus into the darkness during a Maundy Thursday service where the story of Jesus' Passion is dramatically portrayed. Let the drama resonate with your own experiences of fear and futility, suffering and loss, injustice and powerlessness. If you do this, the triumph of Easter will deeply resonate with those parts of your life too. You will feel in your bones what hope is like, and you will know in your soul that the shadows that follow all of your steps do not need to define your course because they do not determine your destiny.

Here is poem by Walter Brueggemann to help carry us through the rest of Lent into Easter:

*We are still the people walking.
We are still people in the dark,
and the darkness looms large around us,
beset as we are by fear,
anxiety,
brutality,
violence,
loss —
a dozen alienations that we cannot manage.*

*We are — we could be — people of your light.
So we pray for the light of your glorious presence
as we wait for your appearing;
we pray for the light of your wondrous grace
as we exhaust our coping capacity;
we pray for your gift of newness that
will override our weariness;
we pray that we may see and know and hear and trust
in your good rule.*

*That we may have energy, courage, and freedom to enact
your rule through the demands of this day.
We submit our day to you and to your rule, with deep joy and high hope.*

To Life, to Light, to Hope! Pastor Dave

