



The First Congregational Church of Reading

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST • AN OPEN AND AFFIRMING CONGREGATION

Produced by our Church Family

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First ChurchNEWS

Statement of Purpose

We gather as a faith community to love and magnify God. Guided by the Holy Spirit, we will love our neighbors as ourselves, advocating for peace and justice. We will go out and share our faith in Christ, inviting others to join us. We will be nurturers of the spirit and teachers of the Word. We will welcome and provide sanctuary to all.

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Walking with Jesus during Lent

The word "lent" derives from the Anglo-Saxon word "lencten," which means "lengthen," for the days begin to lengthen in the early spring when our Lenten journey begins. Lent originally developed into a forty-day period of penitence and fasting, designed as a final act of spiritual discipline for individuals who had devoted the previous three years preparing themselves for baptism. Baptism, one of the most poignant symbols of Christ's death and resurrection, was performed only once a year--on Easter Sunday. Gradually, the practice of penitence during Lent was adopted for observance by the entire church.

The significance of a forty-day period has several roots in the Bible. Probably the most direct link is the forty days Christ fasted and withstood Satan's temptation, in preparation for his public ministry (Matt. 4:2, Luke 4:2). This accounts for the early requirement of fasting by candidates for baptism. It is also generally believed that Jesus was in the tomb for about forty hours.

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday. It falls forty days before Easter, with Sundays excluded because every Sunday is considered a "little Easter" in celebration of Christ's resurrection throughout the year. Drawing upon the numerous biblical references to sackcloth and ashes as symbols of impassioned repentance and extreme grief, the symbolism of Ash Wednesday helps believers to adopt a personal attitude of repentance before God. See, for instance, Job 42:6 where Job repents before God in dust and ashes.

Our Lenten Journey begins on **Ash Wednesday**, February 25 at 6 p.m. with a soup and bread supper followed by a 7p.m. worship service in the tradition of Taize. Taize is a community in France that seeks to unite the global church through music. Its songs and chants are hauntingly simple and beautiful, designed to be sung over and over to create a contemplative and meditative state. Dr. Bendroth will preach and there will be the imputation of ashes and Holy Communion. Child-care will be provided.



On the **First Sunday of Lent** (March 1) the children will "bury the Allelujah" during worship and we won't see or hear it again until Easter. During the Lenten season we will be having a "reverse Advent candle lighting," so to speak. There will be seven purple candles on the altar all lit on the first Sunday of Lent and each week we will extinguish one around a liturgy as the season grows darker and darker as Christ nears his cross.

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The In-Between Time...

"Keep Hope Alive!" or "What Would Jesus Do If the Dow Dropped 700 points in One Day, We Were Fighting Wars on Two Fronts, the Planet Was Heating Up, Healthcare Costs Were Spiraling Out of Control, and Other Such Matters"?

Hope is a precious commodity these days. It was a theme that caught the American people's imagination during President Obama's campaign. While Rush Limbaugh calls hope sentimental and naïve, the apostle Paul included it at one of three foundational forces—faith, hope, and love—that "remain" when everything else goes belly up.

During his time in a Nazi prison, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote to his friend Eberhard Bethge that he was neither a pessimist (expecting things to get worse) nor an optimist (expecting things to get better). He said that he was living by hope.

I find Bonhoeffer's allusion to hope as an alternative to optimism or pessimism to be helpful. Bonhoeffer was writing about hope in a moment when he was awaiting execution because of his opposition to Nazism and his underground church movement. Our problems pale in comparison with his. In these days of financial meltdown, most of us have lost money in our pension funds and 401K's. Bonhoeffer lost his life. But to the very end he defined reality in the context of a larger hope.

Biblical hope is much different than the way we use the word in everyday parlance; as in, "I hope it doesn't rain tomorrow." Optimism looks at the data and makes a positive assessment about the future; pessimism a negative assessment. But hope looks squarely at that same data and dares to see a different outcome because God is behind all of history.

President Barack Obama laid out the mess we're in pretty clearly in his inaugural address:

That we are in the midst of crisis is now well understood. Our nation is at war against a far-reaching network of violence and hatred. Our economy is badly weakened...Homes have been lost, jobs shed, businesses shuttered. Our health care is too costly, our schools fail too many -- and each day brings further evidence that the ways we use energy strengthen our adversaries and threaten our planet.

In times like these, fear (the antithesis of hope) is not far from any of us. It is a fear that can eat away at one's soul and render us powerless to do what needs to be done or to be a source of courage for others.

It is the *hope* of which Bonhoeffer wrote that dispels such fear. Not optimism. Not pessimism. But

hope! Jesus' most frequent words to his disciples were, said, "Be not afraid." He repeated this over and over, as if he knew how much they (and we) needed to hear them.

When Israel was under siege from Babylon, the prophet Isaiah warned them not to rely on false security. They had entered into a shaky alliance with Egypt, they were worshiping false gods, their economy was suffering, and they were trying all kinds of schemes to stave off an attack. Isaiah reminded them, "*Your God reigns!...The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God*" (Is. 52: 7,10). We need to remind ourselves during these lean times that our God still reigns!

The cynic may ask, "*If this is the state of affairs when God is in charge, I'd hate to see the state of the world if God was asleep at the switch!*" But the faith-filled might ask, "*If God is working during these times when so many people and organizations are struggling, what might God be up to?*" I imagine that this question is often asked in other parts of the world also. Places like Darfur, the Congo, and Zimbabwe. Hope becomes operational when we start thinking about how God might be at work.

When trying to think about times in biblical history when there was a similar meltdown, the story of Moses leading a formerly enslaved people through the Sinai desert comes to mind; or the prophet Elisha ministering in the midst of a vast drought; or Jeremiah sitting in the ash heap that was once Jerusalem finding the faith to go on. How did God use those traumas to shape the people of God?

In such times God distills the faith of hopeful people. Perhaps God is wringing out some of the craziness that has entered the world of organized religion in America on the right and on the left to return the church to the simplicity of following Jesus and growing in his character.

Perhaps God wants to cure us of our need for so much "stuff" and the belief that our happiness rises and falls with the stock market. Maybe we can learn to live in smaller houses, walk more, and spend time instead of money with those we love. Perhaps God intends to make hopeful people value simplicity over bigness, purity over slickness, and wholesomeness over having it all.

The In-Between Time (Continued)

Maybe, just maybe, God will remind hopeful people that loving, serving, and generous giving—in bad times AND good—are the sign posts of genuine faith.

I'll bet God might use these times to awaken hopeful people to look at the suffering of the whole world with Jesus' eyes in ways that we have previously ignored.

In sum, I believe that God is asking hopeful people to put it all out on the table and ask once again: What is at the heart of this Gospel we profess that we may have lost during times of prosperity?

Economists are calling this financial mess a time for serious reappraisal of the way we live our lives and do our business. Duh! But maybe there's more.

Maybe these days will generate a massive reappraisal of faith-issues. Out of these times, God may raise up some new, creative spiritual leaders. We may get some fresh, innovative thinking about what it means to be truly converted people. We may regain our credibility in society as having a clear word from the God we claim is "still-speaking."

Perhaps down the line the economic tide will rise again. If that day comes, one wonders, will we who claim loyalty to Jesus be a better disciplined, a more generous, a more focused, and humbler people?

I hope so!

Blessings,

Rev. Norm

February Sermon Series



February 1, 2009

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

Christian Women's Fellowship Circle Sunday

Deut 18:15-20

Mark 1:21-28

1 Cor 8:1-13

"Amazed!" Rev. Bendroth preaching

February 8, 2009

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany/Racial Justice Sunday

Isaiah 40:21-31

Mark 1:29-39

1 Corinthians 9:16-23

Rev. June Cooper, Executive Director of The City Mission Society, preaching

February 15, 2009

Sixth Sunday after Epiphany

2 Kings 5:1-14

Mark 1:40-45

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

"Divine Distance"

Rev. Bendroth preaching

February 22, 2009

Last Sunday after Epiphany/Transfiguration Sunday

2 Kings 2:1-12

Mark 9:2-9

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

"Prelude to Lent" Rev.

Bendroth preaching

February 25, 2009

Ash Wednesday

Joel 2:1-2,12-17a

Matthew 6:1-6,16-21

2 Corinthians 5:20b-

6:10

"Have a Lachrymose Lent" Rev. Bendroth preaching

March 1, 2009

First Sunday of Lent

Genesis 9: 8-17

1 Peter 3: 18-22

Mark 1: 9-15

"Dealing with Wild

Beasts" Rev. Bendroth preaching

A Lenten Experiment in Prayer

Would you like to go deeper in your walk with God? Would you like to develop a regular discipline of prayer in company with fellow travelers? The Deacons are proposing a 40-day fast from non-essential meetings and replacing those times with a time of prayer. In this way we will truly be engaged in the "work of the church" instead of simply "church work." How will this happen? A 40-day prayer guide will be made available for all who would like to participate. You can use this for your personal devotions or you might like to share with a prayer partner or a group of two, three or more. In addition, Rev. Bendroth will prepare some guides for Commissions and Committees or any small group that may wish to gather during this time. These guides will actually teach you how to pray if you are unsure where to begin. They will focus on the praise of God, thanksgiving, prayer for the needs and ministries of FCCR, praying for others, listening prayer, informal spontaneous prayer and more!

In the weeks ahead there will be an opportunity to sign up for a Prayer Journal and to indicate whether you would like to sponsor or be part of a prayer group. In addition, Rev. Bendroth will be providing some training and giving resources to those Commissions and Committees that would like to commit their meeting time to prayer. For questions or to sign up early, call Rev. Bendroth at 781-944-0205 x 11 or email him at revnorm.fccr@verizon.net.

Survey Data Helping Finalize Profile

The pastoral search committee is excited to announce that the results of the church-wide "Pastoral Search Survey" were received in January. Thank you to all those who took the time to participate. Your thoughtful answers and comments are greatly appreciated. About 350 surveys were mailed, and 47% of them were returned completed. The 8-member search committee is diligently studying the results and will be meeting over the next few weeks to discuss the information and finalize the descriptive portion of the church profile. The first draft of the profile will be submitted to the Rev. Wendy Vander Hart, Acting Associate Conference Minister, within the month for her input before it is made available to potential candidates who have been recommended through the Metropolitan Boston Association Committee on Ministerial Standing.

Many folks have been asking if and when they will be able to view the results of the survey. Once the committee has had a chance to fully digest the data, a method for sharing the results will be provided for those church members and friends who are interested.

The church profile is a lengthy document that serves as an introduction to our congregation to potential ministerial candidates who have passed an initial screening process. The completed profile is one extremely important tool by which interested candidates may get an accurate picture of who we are as a congregation.

If anyone has any questions about the search process, please feel free to contact any of the members on the committee: Joyce Burnham (jaeburnham@comcast.net), Ginny Davenport (Ginny827@aol.com), Christine Hylan (clhylan@verizon.net), Jane McCord (jane.comins.mccord@bankofamerica.com), Bob Svensson (bobsven@comcast.net), Craig Taylor (j.c.taylor@verizon.net), Laurie Tucker (tuckerlandb@yahoo.com) and Steve Viegas (stephenviegas@hotmail.com).

Book Group Selections for February and March

February 3 – The Faith Club by Randy Idliby, Suzanne Oliver, and Priscilla Warner

Jennifer Souza and Judie Williams will engage the group in discussion of the interfaith dialogue shown in this book by three women representing Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. The writers began their "faith club" after 9/11. Each woman came with her own prejudices, her unique faith story, and with stereotypes and misconceptions. The writing is made very personal and clearly shares the high and low points as they learned both about one another's faith and also about their own faith.

March 3 – The Shack by William Paul Young

Barbara Philbrick will lead the group in this novel with its theme of redemption and its metaphor of a house built out of your own pain. The author wrote this book to help make sense for himself and his family of his own pain and difficulties. His experience of God's love is seen through his version of the trinity: God as a large black woman with a "questionable" sense of humor, the Holy Spirit as an Asian woman named Sarayu, and Jesus as a Middle Eastern laborer. The book has its rough spots, but it is talked about by many as having helpful springboards for deeper discussion. As a reviewer in Christianity Today said, "The Shack is a novel, after all, not a systematic theology.....this is a story with the potential to wake readers up, to rekindle or reinvigorate their faith."



The Book Club meets on the first Tuesday of the month from 7:30 to 9:00 in the church parlor. Please contact John or Mary Ann Lape if you have questions (978 664-3583 or malape@verizon.net).

Here Comes the Pony Express

In the late 1800s, the Pony Express relayed saddlebags of mail across the Western United States. Although brief, the Pony Express era was a memorable time in our nation's history.

Less significant on a national scale, but no less significant to our congregation, this March marks an important 100th anniversary in FCCR's history. On March 9, 1909, the original structure of what we know as "our church" burned to the ground, initiating the plan to construct our physical church which stands today.



We hope that to acknowledge these milestones in our nation's and church's history, that this year's Pony Express Stewardship Campaign is as successful as last year's. Due to your generous giving, and the supervision of our 23 "trail bosses," last year's campaign raised over \$200,000 in pledges, which amounted to a 14% dollar increase from 2007 from a 20% increase in pledges. Building on that success, this year's campaign will again be modeled after the Pony Express, using a relay system among local active church families. Look for your neighbor to pass along a saddlebag of stewardship information to you this March. Each of us

will be able to thoughtfully and prayerfully review the materials when making our pledge for the coming fiscal year.

For sure, these are difficult economic times in our country and community. But while we face many financial obligations out of need, our stewardship to FCCR and the UCC is done out of faith, hope and love. While our church may have burned to the ground in 1909, our faith has stood tall for more than 100 years, our hope springs eternal and our love is everlasting.

The Stewardship Committee thanks you for your ongoing support of our church.

Doug Rogers
Stephen Viegas
John Myers



NOW Meeting February 16 and Potential Timeline to Reorganizing

The NOW Group meets on the third Monday of each month—with the next meeting at 7:30 on **Monday, February 16th**. The NOW group uses their energy to back any ideas that supports Nurture Outreach and Witness.

In January, Dr. David Reid came across the street from the Reading Baptist Church to share their experience around reorganizing their structure. They invested 5 years from the first conversation to implementing the plan. We feel like we have laid groundwork and hopefully can implement in less time, but it was good to hear that the process does take a long time (so we can spend less time beating ourselves up for our slowness). They also make decisions using a consensus process which we found very interesting. He left us copies of their report, which are in the office.

In February, we are hoping to hold some forums on restructuring—how we plan to finally test out a new organization, while continuing to run the church. We will talk about how we will formally propose at the annual meeting a plan to officially suspend certain parts of the bylaws. In March, we will pick a day for workshop on a flexible organizational structure, and the plan is to develop a straw man organization to consider. In April, we will present a straw man for feedback and revision. In May, we will present the proposal for suspending bylaws and propose a new organization at the annual meeting.

It was decided at the last annual meeting that the NOW group would spearhead this reorganization. NOW is a loose group of interested people interested in moving the church forward using the navigational tools created in the Golden Days meetings. You are a member of NOW if you are interested in moving the church forward. So please join us or contact Linda Ananian, lcanaanian@aol.com.

Outreach Opportunities

Monthly Collection for Reading Food Pantry: In January, we began supporting a monthly focused donation for the Reading Food Pantry, concentrating on collecting on the first week of the month. Of course, all items are needed at all times, but we thought if we established a routine, for ourselves and the church, we would be thinking about our contributions on a scheduled and routine basis.

In February, we will be collecting **Red** for Valentines Day – catsup, red juices, salsa and spaghetti sauces. March will be St. Patrick's Day **Green** – canned spinach, relish, olives.

Around Mother's day, Outreach and CWF will be sponsoring an "All Church Collection" of **Gifts of the Heart**. These Hygiene Kits for Church World Service Kits are distributed anywhere in the world in response to global emergencies and disasters. In the face of natural disasters, violence, or grinding poverty, a Hygiene Kit can mean the difference between sickness and health for struggling families.

The Outreach Commission will be making and serving **lunch to participants in the common cathedral** on Boston Common **Sunday, March 22**. We need people who would be willing to make the lunch and accompany us into Boston.

One Great Hour of Sharing, one of MAUCC collections, will be held on **March 22**. OGHS Supports partners in more than 70 countries with ministries that fund development projects, feed the victims of famine, provide services for displaced people, and respond to natural disasters. These ministries are the responsibility of Wider Church Ministries, Global Sharing of Resources.

Emmaus Linen Drive in February

Blankets and pillows and sheets, oh my! In February, the Outreach Commission is running a bedding drive for the residents of Emmaus House, and also for the residents of the eight other housing units run by Emmaus, Inc. in Haverhill. Most of you are familiar with Emmaus House, the family emergency shelter that serves up to 15 families at one time. But Emmaus, Inc. provides many more beds beyond those.

Its Bethel Transitional Apartments provide transitional housing and case management to formerly homeless women and their children. Families live in their own apartments for up to 2 years while they participate in job training and learn to be self sufficient. The Columbia Park Apartments consists of 32 affordable apartment units that are rented to community members at market value. Emerson Street Apartments offers 12 units of permanent independent housing for homeless disabled individuals. Gilead House is a supportive transitional residence for mentally ill adults who are recovering from substance abuse. Residents have their own rooms and share a kitchen and common room. Jericho House provides six units of Safe Haven supportive housing program for chronically homeless men and women. The program targets individuals living with severe mental illness and/or addictions. Mitch's Place is a year-round emergency overnight shelter for single men and women. Finally, the Winter Street Apartments consist of six newly renovated apartments that provide affordable permanent housing to homeless disabled women....Donations can be left in the Outreach collection box outside the church office.

Thank you, all!

Items need include:

Pillows (NEW only)

TWIN sheets, pillowcases, mattress covers and blankets (new or used, Emmaus has only twin beds)

Towels, washcloths and bath mats (new or used)

Crib sheets, blankets and mattress covers (new or used)

Shower curtains (new or used)

Martin Luther King Day Celebration

If you weren't able to shovel out of your driveway in time for the January 19th Reading celebration of Martin Luther King Day, you missed a wonderful program. There were musical offerings by the Reading Community Singers, the RMHS Chorus and a vocal ensemble from the Korean Church of the Nazarene.

However, the centerpiece of the event was a film entitled: Jahmol's Vision—Creating Peace in the World of Teen Handgun Violence. The Jahmol Norfleet Video Project is teen directed and has been put together with the support of City Mission Society in Boston (a close friend of this church). The Video Project has produced a documentary called "Jahmol's Vision", based on the life of Jahmol Norfleet, 20, who was shot to death in Roxbury in November, 2006. Jahmol was exceptionally charismatic, and in the year prior to his murder he led a peace movement among the youth of Boston. Today his younger sister and a circle of friends continue to work to fulfill Jahmol's vision of peace in the streets. The video focuses on the challenge facing these young people in staying committed to promoting peace.

On more than one occasion during the showing of the film, I was moved to tears; I imagine I was not alone. There were a number of points that have stayed with me through the week following. One was a baseball-style cap that several of the young men in the video were wearing, which bore these initials: IWBS. What that means is "I will be

somebody." Isn't that what each one of us wants for ourselves? Isn't that what we want for our children, our friends' children, for all of God's children? To be somebody—to "be" in the future.

We heard from Teah Norfleet, Jahmol's younger sister, and several friends and supporters of the project. They spoke of teaching peace, of modeling behaviors for younger children, of encouraging youngsters to find ways to resolve issues short of violence.

There was also a rap song that played a number of times over the course of the film called "Listen." Many of us would have liked to have the lyrics to the song—it was compelling. However, it turns out that those of us viewing the film were in some sense a "premier" audience. The film, the song, have not yet been released. And that means there will be another opportunity if you missed MLK Day. City Mission Society will be having an official release in the coming months. Through our connection to CMS via Norm, who serves on the board, we will know when this will take place. It would be wonderful if we could gather a group to go in and support the event—maybe we might even consider a special collection before then, to benefit this project and its outreach. Boston is our own back yard; these youngsters there are our neighbors.

(submitted by Gay Williams)

Silent Auction—Saturday, May 2nd

Our annual spring dinner and auction will be held on the evening of May 2nd. Details will follow later, but get the date on your calendars now, your relatives' calendars, your neighbors' calendars, your friends' calendars. We look forward to having our entire extended church family at this annual social event and important fundraiser.





Coffeehouse



KINDRED

An evening of Irish Music



Saturday, February 7, 2009 6:00 PM
Ham and Bean Supper & Coffeehouse

Ham and Bean Supper: 6:00PM, Adults \$8; Children
(6-12) \$3, kids 5 and under are FREE; Family max \$20

Coffeehouse with Kindred: No charge (Free Will
Offering) after supper (around 7:30pm)

Come for one or come for both!

First Congregational Church of Reading
www.churchofreading.org

*Please bring your family and friends – Kindred is not to
be missed!*

Christian Women's Fellowship

Ham and Bean Supper: On Saturday, February 7th, the second Ham and Bean Supper and Coffee-house will be held. Dinner starts at 6:00, and the coffeehouse will follow at about 7:30. The menu is home baked beans, ham, hot dogs, corn bread, cole slaw and cake for dessert. Cost is \$7.00 for adults, \$3.00 for children 12 and over. Dinner is free for those under 6, and the total for a family is \$20. The Coffee house will feature Irish music; a free-will offering is taken. Our suppers always offer good food and good company, so we hope to see everyone there.

Circle Sunday: Circle Sunday is Sunday, February 1st. Please come and enjoy companionship and good food provided by the Circles.

Plant Sale: For the past two years Joan Kingston and Mary Ann Higgins have held a spring plant exchange/sale. They are unable to continue this year, so if anyone is interested in carrying on - and creating - a tradition, please contact Lorna Knapp or Joan or Mary Ann. This has been a successful event, so we hope some women will be interested.

Rummage Sale: Women's Fellowship is no longer sponsoring the Rummage Sale held for many years in late March. However, there will still be a sale this year, sponsored by individuals, with profits being shared with non-profit groups, on March 13 and 14.

Confirmation News

Martin Luther King Day of Service

The 2008-2009 Confirmation class consists of 19 students this year. We meet the first Sunday of the month for dinner and a session and on the third Sunday of the month during worship. Topics covered thus far are: The Christian Story, Creation, The Church Year, and Baptism and Communion. On November 23, we traveled to Emmaus House, a homeless shelter for families in Haverhill, and prepared and served a meal.

Mentors: The confirmation process includes each Confirmand working with an adult mentor. They meet at least four times together and discuss their faith journey, spiritual gifts and service, and spiritual practices. In addition, they observe a worship service, a funeral, baptism or wedding together and attend a worship service in another faith tradition. The mentor and their student are each reading the Gospel of Luke and keeping a journal on it.

Martin Luther King Day of Service: On January 17th the FCCR Confirmation class, mentors, and parents, alongside other neighboring churches and community activists participated in a day long MLK Day of Service and Learning lead by The City Mission Society of Boston. The day began with worship at United Parish Church in Brookline. Each church or group was assigned and traveled to a work site where they volunteered time and talent to improve the conditions of non-profit agencies that support the Boston area community they serve. FCCR worked in the Brighton Congregational Church to repair, clean, paint an independent food pantry, as well as help to sort, tag and arrange their clothing drive. The group witnessed many who traveled to the pantry that day for aid. We learned from this experience how vitally important it is to serve such an agency who everyday supports the community in Brighton /Boston. The day concluded with worship at United Parish and an ice cream social.

Upcoming Retreat: We are very excited to announce that on January 30-31, that Confirmands will have a unique opportunity to attend an overnight retreat at Grotonwood. The retreat will be a wonderful opportunity to get to know each other better, grow in their faith journey, and meet new friends from surrounding communities. Everyone should have received a packet of information about this event, including how to prepare and what you need to bring. Here is the web page for your review: <http://www.grotonwood.org/DesktopDefault.aspx>.

Confirmation Gatherings

Feb. 15: Confirmands will travel to the First Baptist Church, Reading for Sunday worship, details on this event to follow.

March 1: Confirmands meet Sunday evening for dinner and then meet in the FCCR—Chapel.

Town Wide Rummage Sale Clothing and Textiles

Friday March 13 6-9pm
Saturday March 14 10am-2pm

25 Woburn Street, Reading
First Congregational Church of Reading, UCC

Clean, functional donations may be dropped off at the church basement off Sanborn Street starting Monday, March 2nd.

Volunteer to help by contacting info@readingcares.org or calling 781-942-2145. We need sorters during the week before the sale, clerks during the sale, and clean-up help at the end. Earn vouchers to use at the sale, help your community, and have fun with your neighbors!

Vouchers are also available for qualifying individuals and families through Reading Town Hall. Contact Elder/Human Services at 781-942-6608.

*Proceeds to benefit the **Reading Food Pantry.***

Sponsored by: 

The First Congregational Church of Reading, UCC.

Thank you

Dear Friends,

The year 2008 was a very difficult year emotionally as was the tribute to Jacquie's memory by Mary Ann Higgins and her altar committee.

Jacquie loved this church and gave so much of herself for it.

No one could ask for a better church family than we both found here. I would love to embrace each of you personally and say "thank you" for the love and affection you've shown.

My daughter, granddaughter and myself simply say "thank you" truly from the bottom of our hearts. – She will always be in our memories, and I hope yours as well.

With love and affection to all, Gordon Little

Dear FCCR,

Thanks to all for the prayers, good wishes and altar flowers following my December spine surgery. Your impact on the healing process is definite and strong. Following physical therapy I expect a marked improvement in my golf game.

Dave Osborne

Dear Congregation Members:

On behalf of the Reading Food Pantry I want to thank you for your Christmas Collection of food. Your donation will help us to provide items needed by our clients. As you know this is a difficult economy and the number of families seeking our help is increasing dramatically (two or more new families each week). We appreciate the continued support of the churches in providing this important ministry.

Sincerely, Phyllis Maxwell, Administrative Coordinator

We received a phone call from Norm's daughter, Anna thanking the church for her college "care package".

Thank you so much for the care package you sent me during finals. It was greatly appreciated and it's nice to know that you were thinking of me.

Sincerely, Sarah Ulrich



"Thank You" Overlooked!

We were so excited to tell you about the "care packages" that were sent to FCCR college youth during the holidays that we overlooked a key "ingredient". That would be the boxes! What's a care package without a box to hold it? Many, many thanks to Kathleen Taylor and friends at the North Reading UPS Store for their generous donation of boxes. We are very grateful.

Coffee Hour

We could still use some Coffee Hour Volunteers. This is not a weekly commitment. Once a month, twice a year, whatever you choose. Feb. 15th is open.... Please see Joan Kingston or contact the Church Office.



Giving Opportunities

Dear Deacons and Friends of FCCR:

This February vacation week I am going to Honduras on a service trip as part of a group of 12 students and 3 teachers from my school, Reading High. We are going to El Hogar School and Orphanage in Tegucigalpa. There we will live in the volunteer house and work on a construction project assigned to us during the day time, and in the evenings we will spend time with the children, playing with them and getting to know them. To fund the cost of materials for the project, we need to raise at least \$2,000.

Honduras is the second poorest country in the Americas. With an illiteracy rate of 25%, an unemployment rate hovering at 30%, and more than half the population living below the poverty line, it can be difficult for Hondurans to create a better life. Many children literally live "on the streets." In the face of desperate poverty where the average annual income is less than \$1,000, children who should be in school are on the streets. The families they come from can no longer feed, clothe, or educate them. Their homes, little more than cardboard and tin pieced together, offer no space, no running water, and little hope of a future.

I would like to provide the Congregation with the opportunity to support our mission trip to Tegucigalpa. Your contribution will help us to give children at El Hogar the quality of life and future they deserve. Please send your contribution in the form of a check or money order to: Reading Memorial High School, Attn: Mary Anne Lynn, 62 Oakland Road, Reading, MA 01867. Please write 'El Hogar' on the memo line. Checks should be made payable to: Reading Memorial High School.

Thank you for supporting this important project!

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Amanda Doodlesack

Giving Opportunity for Our Music Ministry



As a member of the American Guild of English Handbell Ringers, the FCCR Jubilate Choir has the opportunity to participate in a bell ringing workshop/festival every other year held around New England. Two years ago in June, a number of our bell ringers attended the festival at the University of Rhode Island. This year, the festival will be held June 25-28, on the campus of the University of Maine-Orono.

In order to help defray some of the costs, we are hoping the congregation may step in with support. We're planning a special offering to help fund the Handbell Ensemble participation in an upcoming Handbell Festival. We will take the offering in worship on Feb 8th or folks can send in donations to the church office by marking "Handbell Festival" in the memo line of their checks.

Service Opportunity for Young Adults

United Church of Christ Volunteer Ministries has announced a new program – **UCC Companion Communities: Young Adult Service Communities**. This is a great opportunity for 21-30 year olds to participate in intentional community living, service and social justice action, and spiritual conversation. Both 10 week summer and 10 month communities are forming, beginning in June and September, 2009.

The Young Adult Service Communities are hosted in local UCC congregations in various parts of the United States. Participants serve in local justice advocacy and direct social service settings. Volunteers network nationally with each other in the various Companion Communities settings.

In these challenging economic times, when jobs may be difficult to find, perhaps some young person you know would welcome this opportunity to enrich their life experience with such a service opportunity. Go to <http://www.ucc.org/volunteer> for more information or contact Executive for Volunteer Ministries, Mary Schaller Blaufuss blaufusm@ucc.org or 866-822-8224 ext. 3214.

Daily prayers are invited for all of our friends and members-especially those who are dealing with these special joys and concerns. They and their families are most grateful for your spiritual support and cards of greeting.



We pray for healing, recovery, and strength for:

- ✓ Hope that brother Lawrence returns to full health.
- ✓ A friend having hip replacement on Wednesday.
- ✓ Nancy Tucker, Brian's sister-in-law, with breast cancer.
- ✓ My sister who is starting dialysis.

We pray for those who are grieving:

- ✓ A friend whose mother died on Christmas Day.
- ✓ Craig Vickery and family, at the death of his father.

We also pray for the following special concerns:

- ✓ The LeConti family for strength and hope with Bryce's everyday challenges.
- ✓ Please continue to pray for Ken who voluntarily entered rehab and is finishing 3 weeks. Please give him strength and courage to stay with it.
- ✓ For a dear friend and her two children as she ends her marriage because of her husband's alcoholism.
- ✓ A new Mom who is becoming homeless.
- ✓ Marcie Atkins who is undergoing chemo treatment.
- ✓ Peace in Gaza.
- ✓ For Ponny Wood and family as she undergoes medical tests this week.
- ✓ A niece battling Sjögren's syndrome and Guillain-Barre syndrome with four adopted kids to raise.
- ✓ My cousin who has been operated on for colon cancer.

There is much in our community for which we thank God and we pray in celebration for:

- ✓ Congratulations to Anthony and Juliette Morgan for their baby girl Lillian, born 12/24-Ginny Davenport's great granddaughter.

- ✓ In celebration of the life of Anne Flietner, my aunt, who died yesterday.
- ✓ Praise for a new niece, Destiny.
- ✓ The birth of Aiden Joseph Reid, Jan. 7th to Candice and Dave.
- ✓ Barack Obama for his leadership.
- ✓ The Coolidge cast and crew of "The Secret Garden" as well as their families and school staff.
- ✓ Thanksgiving to Rev. Norm and the Reading Clergy Association for organizing the MLK program, which was moving and inspiring.
- ✓ My niece who is pregnant with her third set of twins.

Our prayers continue for those who are in need of ongoing nursing care or assisted living:

- ✓ Bertha Babb (Susan Suarez's mother) at Bear Hill.
- ✓ Doris Torppa (Susan Torppa's mother) at Bear Hill.
- ✓ John Weston at Longwood Place.
- ✓ Libby Hodges at son's in Connecticut.

And those who are cared for at home:

Jane Rice Peter Thorstensen
Molly Rowe Grace Faulkner

Please call the church office for these addresses if you would like to send a card or visit these friends.

Altar Flowers in January



Altar Flowers are given in loving memory of Gladys and Warren Killam, Jr. and Stanley and Agnes Pizarz, by Henry and Audrey Pizarz and their family. Also in loving memory of Mr. and Mrs. J. Warren Killam, Jr. and Dr. and Mrs. Arthur Maloney by the Honorable James W. Killam III and family.

Altar Flowers are given in loving memory of all our departed loved ones by the Kingston family.

Altar Flowers are given in loving memory of Beverly Costa by her family.

Want to get involved with a committee, but only a short term basis? Here is your chance! The **Altar Committee** needs volunteers to sign up to deliver the beautiful altar flowers on Sundays, beginning at the end of February. The sign up calendar will be available at Coffee Hour and on the Office Bulletin Board. This is a great activity to do with your kids, as well. If you would like to join the Altar Committee, see Mary Ann Higgins. There are no meetings!

Also, many, many thanks to the Altar Committee and all the other parishioners who volunteered their time to make our Church look so lovely during the Christmas season. The Moravian stars added just the right touch to the new tree acquired in memory of Jacquie Little. Your efforts certainly enhanced our worship and are much appreciated. The poinsettias that many of us gave in honor and in memory of loved ones also lent a festive look to the sanctuary.

calendar