

**March
2022**

Still Speaking

Newsletter of First Congregational United Church of Christ of Alpena

Board of Directors

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- Deborah Butler,
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Dates to Remember

March 2– Ash
Wednesday

March 2– Mysticism
Class

March 3– Welcoming
Committee Meeting

March 6–Worship
Service

March 9– Mysticism
Class

March 13–Daylight
Saving Time Begins

March 13–Worship
Service

March 14–Board of
Directors Meeting

March 16–Mysticism
Class

March 17–Happy St.
Patrick's Day!

March 20–Worship
Service

March 23–Mysticism
Class

March 27–Worship
Service



It is That Time of the Year Again – Lent

Rev. Dr. H. Robert Case

When I was growing up, Lent simply meant giving something up. To be honest most of my growing up time I neither knew why or actually tried giving up something of real importance. I would sneak a candy or two when I would try to give up sweets. Lent really just did not have much meaning. I belonged to the Reformed side of the Evangelical and Reformed Church and Lent was not as important as it was for my Lutheran and Catholic friends, as they seemed to take Lent very seriously. We do not have the time to go into what it means to be part of the Reformed branch of Christianity (I might take that up at a later time), but we were not as liturgical as many of my friends. For example, we only celebrated communion 4-5 times a year. Holy Communion was done once a quarter and, I think, on Maundy Thursday. As I try and remember, it is not clear that we even celebrated Maundy Thursday. My memory tells me we had Palm Sunday, Good Friday and Easter services. I often tell my Lutheran, Episcopal, and Catholic friends we did not even have Ash Wednesday services and it was strange not having those ashes on my forehead that many of my friends wore on their foreheads.

This was the similar pattern in this church. When I arrived we did not have Lenten services because, as Rev. Jack Fitzgerald told me, we had trouble getting a handful of people together to do Lenten studies. When I first arrived, the first few years we struggled with getting people together to “observe” Lent. It began to pick up when we started doing more programs ecumenically with our more liturgical brothers and sisters. A story I often tell is about the time I switched places with the pastor at St. Paul Lutheran Church. I went to preach one Wednesday evening at St. Paul and he came here to preach. We all know how big the sanctuary at St. Paul is and it was at least 80% full. I forgot to tell him we did not have that tradition. The shock he had when he came to our church and expected a near full house and I think there were maybe 12 people in the congregation. He was stunned to say the least, as was I preaching to an almost full sanctuary. I have come to appreciate the Lenten tradition in our ecumenical settings including the ashes on Ash Wednesday. Sometime I wish to share with you how moving it has become.

We now enter Lent again at a time when we all pray and hope the Covid pandemic is coming to a close. Our ecumenical group of six churches decided again not to have a potluck service on Wednesday evening and the worship committee voted to not have them here with just our congregation. Instead Rev. Gene Bacon is leading a weekly study on Christianity and the mystic tradition drawing us closer to God. I have always thought that was the point of Lent and it can be done in different ways.

We have often discussed the sacred meaning of the number 40; how in history it does not mean the simple number 40. If we look how it is used in the Bible, it always appears at a time of significant transformation whether it is on the mountain for 40 days, how it rained for 40 days and nights, Israel in the

(Continued on Page 2)

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wilderness for 40 years, or Jesus in the wilderness before his temptations. Forty is a transformational period and is not to be taken as literal days and nights. It is like a tunnel that you enter at one end and come to a different place and or person when you leave. That is the purpose of Lent's 40 days excluding Sundays. We enter at Ash Wednesday looking through the tunnel to Holy Week and Easter. We enter the tunnel this coming Wednesday March 2nd and seek to become closer to God during this time of Lent. (Sundays are not part of Lent but are Sundays during Lent because every Sunday is to be a celebration of the Resurrection.)

I will be placing on the table at the back of the sanctuary, prayers, scripture readings and other devotional material. It is my hope that you will take these readings and spend time each day, maybe starting with just five minutes, and read, pray and think about your faith and how to deepen it. I do not usually abstain from something during Lent, although that might be part of your Lenten devotional, but add something each day to bring me closer to the LOVE and FORGIVENESS that motivate my faith. This means that sometimes I will omit something. not that it is my goal, but I fill it with Lenten Practices.

Rev. Bacon and I wish you a meaningful and refreshing Lent. Peace and Grace to you, Bob

A Few More Things From Reverend Case:

- * The Worship Committee continues to try to get our church up and running and doing it safely. We will start using greeters again. Please leave a message with the office for Boris Gerber if you would like to be a greeter. We will not have ushers or pass the offering plates again for at least another month. We will also continue to use the self-contained communion cups and wafers for now.
- * If you know of someone who would appreciate receiving a "care letter" from the church, please inform Judy in the office. Care letters do not have to be because of illness or tragedy, we are also looking to celebrate positive events. The person does not have to be a member or attend the church to be put on the care letter list.
- * It is important that we gather together a prayer group. Here is a brief introduction -
 Prayer group/chain members will pray at least four times a week for people on the list.
 Members will be given a list of people, organizations, and issues each month.
 We will meet (in-person and virtually) most months to discuss progress and share support.
 We will have communion three times a year.
 Please contact the office or complete the form at the back of the church if you would like to join!

Feed A Family Update

Missions Committee

Currently, the Salvation Army is in need of the following items for the food pantry:

Sloppy Joe mix, Hamburger/Tuna/Chicken Helper packs, canned spaghetti sauce (for children), peanut butter & crackers packages, cheese & crackers packages, Jello/pudding cups.

Thanks for supporting our Feed A Family program! – Missions Committee

Pastor Pivot

Judy Suszek, Office Administrator



Our transitional ministers, Reverend Bob Case and Reverend Gene Bacon continue to alternate months of service. Reverend Bacon is ministering during the month of March. He will perform all weekly worship services and any additional services, funerals, weddings, baptisms, visits/calls that occur during the month. As always, to reach Reverend Bacon you may call the church office at 989-356-1795, call him directly at 989-340-0358, or email him at alpuccpastor@gmail.com.





One Great Hour of Sharing Offering Sunday, March 27

The One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) special mission offering of the United Church of Christ involves you in disaster, refugee/immigration, and development ministries throughout the world. When a disaster strikes or people are displaced or made refugees by violence or extreme poverty, you are part of the immediate response and of the long-term recovery. Through OGHS you engage in holistic development programs including health care, education, agriculture, food sustainability, micro-financing and women's empowerment. Because the UCC relates in mutual partnership to churches and organizations through Global Ministries and worldwide response & recovery networks, your contributions to One Great Hour of Sharing put you in the right place at the right time for the relief, accompaniment and recovery of the most vulnerable. You meet immediate needs and you address the underlying causes that create those needs in the first place.

Your contribution will be gratefully accepted at a church service or by mail to the church office. Please either use the One Great Hour of Sharing envelope included in the Sunday service bulletins, or just note on your check "for OGHS". Thank you for your generous contribution.

Study Group Invitation

Dottie Haase

Rosemary Gibson (Pastor Rose) is the new minister at the Atlanta UCC church – the former church home for Ginny and Keith Titus. She is inviting our friends and members to join her in a study group for all who want to strengthen their spiritual journey. The book Pastor Rose will use is [We Make the Road By Walking](#) by Brian McClaren. The book offers everything you need to explore what a difference a living, growing faith can make in our world today. The study began February 14 and will be on-going so you may join at any time. You may join in person at Atlanta UCC on Mondays, 10:30-11:30am (facemasks required) or via Zoom on Mondays, 7:00-8:00pm. Please contact Dottie Haase for more information at dsbhaase@live.com.

Fellowship Hour hosting help is needed for May through December. Please contact Bill Haase at 989-916-4104 or dsbhaase@live.com if you would like to volunteer your time.

Choir Corner

Kat Tomaszewski, Choir Director and Organist

Extending a great big thank you to Dr. Avery Aten for planning and arranging some pieces for the bell choir this spring, and to our wonderful bell ringers who gathered February 23 to kick off the season! If you are interested in ringing with the bell choir, please call the church office and leave a message for Dr. Aten. We would love to have you!

Please see the Choir Corner insert for a beautiful reading about the importance of Lenten music!



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Office Hours: 9:00 am – 1:00 pm, Monday – Thursday

Sunday Worship: 10:00 a.m.
In person and Online

**Transitional Pastors: Rev. Dr. H. Robert Case
and Rev. Eugene Bacon**
Organist/Choir Director: Kat Tomaszewski
Treasurer: Denise Fusina
Office Administrator: Judy Suszek
Custodian: Mike LaMarre

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March Celebrations

Birthdays

Grady Barden	March 3	Carol Knowlton	March 20
Ty Barbeau	March 5	Nick Jarmuzewski	March 24
Wendy Bailey Graves	March 7	Belinda Hanna	March 26
Beth Petty	March 8	Jill Bailey	March 27
Rev. Gene Bacon	March 12	Cindy Straley	March 27
Pat Labadie	March 17	Spencer Kibbe	March 27



Anniversaries

Jim and Patty McNeil March 9 26 Years

Congratulations!



Think Spring!



Choir Corner

Kat Tomaszewski, Choir Director and Organist

This month while reading about the importance of music during our Lenten journey, I found this excellent piece written by Anne McNair, director of music at First Presbyterian Church in Savannah, Georgia. She is also president of the Presbyterian Association of Musicians. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did.

--Kat

As we embark on our Lenten journeys each year, we often think of those journeys as personal and private. We enter into a somewhat solitary season of reflection, prayer, fasting, reading and meditation. Indeed, the liturgical season of Lent gives us opportunities for personal reflection like no other time in the church year. Perhaps we have been influenced in our quest for an individual journey by the African-American spiritual "Jesus Walked This Lonesome Valley."

The hymns that we sing have the power to strike a chord deep within that often shape our theological and spiritual approach to being a faithful child of God. Upon reflection, the hymn "Jesus Walked This Lonesome Valley" emphasizes the individualistic nature of our Lenten journeys. The truth of the gospel message is that we are not alone in our faith journey. God is with us and has created the church, that we may offer support and encouragement to one another in community.

*Jesus walked this lonesome valley,
He had to walk it by himself.
Oh, nobody else could walk it for him,
He had to walk it by himself.*

*We must walk this lonesome valley,
We have to walk it by ourselves.
Oh, nobody else can walk it for us,
We have to walk it by ourselves.*

*You must go and stand your trial,
You have to stand it by yourself.
Oh, nobody else can stand it for you,
You have to stand it by yourself.*

*Deep in the heart of winter, when days seem cold and bleak,
Our faith calls us to enter this space of seven weeks.
We turn to prayer and fasting, take scripture as our guide,
Prepare our souls for Easter, and joyful Eastertide.*

*A time of deep reflection, a time to search the heart.
Yet more than introspection calls us to do our part.
We turn our thoughts to others, our kin both far and near,
Our families, sisters, brothers, the ones we hold most dear.*

*Our prayers reach further out now, and think of all whose needs
Cry out for our attention, yearn for our faithful deeds.
The sick, the poor, the hungry, all those who are oppressed,
Those folk our Savior taught us to see as truly blessed.*

*So mark these days as holy, our truly Lenten time.
Let every seeking soul be restored, renewed, refined.
Till in our Savior's footsteps, beneath his cross we pray,
Then meet him in the garden, rejoice on Easter Day.*

I recently read a new Lenten hymn, written in October 2017 by J. Barrie Shepherd, retired senior minister from First Presbyterian Church in New York City. This hymn called "Deep in the Heart of Winter" better reflects the balance between an individual Lenten journey within the context of community.

The very act of singing is mysterious. Often, our individual voices are not what we deem to be worthy of singing our praise to God. Yet, each week we join our voices with others, and the Holy Spirit gives us a collective voice to rival that of angels singing God's glory. Perhaps it is a foretaste of the day when all will gather around God's throne singing "Alleluia!"

But during Lent, when we forego the "Alleluias," what should we sing? Of course, that may be different for each congregation.

Some congregations cherish the old, familiar hymns. Others relish fresh new language and tunes. We all likely need both. When singing hymns that are familiar, we have opportunities to be transported by the music itself since we don't have to think too much about learning the tune and text. Many of us even have the tune and text of a very familiar hymn memorized, so that we may sing from deep within our souls. On the other hand, when singing hymns that are new, we have opportunities for God's spirit to provide new insights into the very nature of God and God's church.

During our individual and corporate journeys as God's faithful people, may we be inspired by the hymns that we sing during Lent, listening for God's voice in the music that surrounds us. May we sing with gratitude for individual insights received during our Lenten journey, as well as for the opportunity to worship in community. May we carry God's light into the world around us, ever widening that community of love and faith.

Each week we join our voices with others, and somehow the Holy Spirit gives us a collective voice to rival that of angels singing God's glory.

Easter Flowers

**Order Deadline
March 31**

Spring

It is time to order Easter flowers!

These flowers will grace our altar area Easter morning, and are offered in honor of or in memory of your friends and family. Please contact the office at 356-1795 or officeuccalp@gmail.com to place your order.



**Tulips, Hyacinths,
and Daffodils – \$17
Easter Lilies – \$20**

