

# MARCH 2024 HILLTOP HERALD

Rev. Andrew Harris  
 Pastor

Chris Stahlinski  
 Moderator

**CONTENTS**

Holy Week	1
Bible Study	2
Music Ministry	2
Green Team	2
Labyrinth Walk	3
Deacons News	3
Missions	4
-Red Wagon Needs	
-C4C	
-OGHS	
-Financial	
-Easter Offering	
Trustees News	5
Gift Card Info	5
Christian Ed	6-7
Joys/Concerns	8
Worship	9
Calendar	10
Plant Sale	11
Easter Flowers	11
Flower Form	11
Pastor News	Insert

**HOLY WEEK**



**PALM SUNDAY**

March 24 10:30am

Palms for this service leading up to Easter Sunday. Come early and welcome each other.

Procession Noon

Join us at St. Mark's Church as we process down Bedford Street to the basketball court at Simonds Park. Leading the way will be a mini-pony!



**MAUNDY THURSDAY**

March 28 7pm

Join us for this solemn worship service with communion and candles. *Not recommended for young children.*



**GOOD FRIDAY**

March 29

Join the Presbyterians at their church for Good Friday activities. More info will be coming!



**EASTER SUNRISE**

March 31 6:30am

Join us outside on the lawn by the basketball court at Simonds Park. Coffee and donuts to follow.



**EASTER EGG HUNT**

March 31 9:45am

Join us for our Easter Egg Hunt provided by Christian Education.



**EASTER FESTIVAL WORSHIP**

March 31 10:30am

**Music - Cross decorating begins @ 10:15am  
 Worship Service begins @10:30am.**

Join us from 10:15-10:30am as we decorate our beautiful floral cross and listen to music from Brian Gionet and guest musicians. At 10:30am our service will begin.



## LENTEN BIBLE STUDY - WILDERNESS

Every Wednesday during the season of Lent we will hold a weekly Bible Study at 2:00pm in the conference room and on Zoom. The theme for this Lenten Bible Study is *Wilderness*. The Wilderness is a place of danger and adventure, an uncharted and unexplored area on our journeys of faith. Each of us has experienced times where we've found ourselves in the wilderness - times that can be both formative and frightening. Together, we'll look at Bible passages that explore this theme of *Wilderness* and talk about how we've experienced *Wilderness* in our own lives. We hope you will join us! Please see the Bible Study schedule below.

March 6 - A Different Kind of Exodus - Romans 6:12-23  
March 13 - Poverty and Plenty - Deuteronomy 8:1-20  
March 20 - Gethsemane - Matthew 26:36-45  
March 27 - Wilderness Stories



Click here to join the Bible study on Zoom: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82860076628>



## MUSIC MINISTRY NEWS!

Choir's schedule for rehearsal is Wednesday night from 7:15pm to 9pm and Sunday morning from 9:30am-10:15am. We are ALWAYS looking for new members because there is always room for more! Come join us on Wednesday or Sunday- all voice types are welcome. If you don't know your voice type, let's find out together!

***Our Classical concert is being held May 19<sup>th</sup>*** following Sunday service, performed by Brian Gionet on Piano, Organ, and Clarinet. It is dedicated to folks with mental health struggles. Come join us for an afternoon of Chopin, Rachmaninoff, and much more!

We need bell people for our bell choir starting soon! Please speak to Brian or any member of the music committee for more information.

## GREEN CHALLENGE!

The Green Team is offering our congregation a weekly challenge for the six weeks of Lent.

Check the hallway bulletin board for what you can do to help save the earth - a different challenge each week.

Here are the six challenges in total:

1. Turn off water when brushing teeth.
2. Turn out lights when leaving a room.
3. Refuse a printed receipt - have it emailed to you instead.
4. Bring your own leftover container when taking food home from a restaurant.
5. Use reusable bags when shopping.
6. Recycle/ learn about Black Earth composting for food waste.



***YOU can make a difference!***

## WALKING THE LABYRINTH

Join us this Lenten season on a journey of reflection and renewal as we invite you to walk the labyrinth. Amidst the hustle and bustle of everyday life, the labyrinth offers a sacred space for quiet contemplation and spiritual centering. Join us in this ancient practice of prayer and reflection as we seek to deepen our connection with God and journey towards spiritual transformation. All are welcome.

You will have three opportunities to walk the labyrinth:

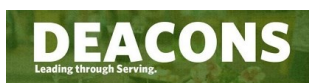
Sunday, March 10, 4-6pm

Saturday, March 16, 4-6pm

Wednesday, March 20, 6-8pm



Please arrive at the start of the program if you would like to learn about the labyrinth and take part in a guided meditation and reflection. Feel free to leave before the end of the program once you've completed your labyrinth journey.



The meeting started with a welcome to new member Jan Costa.

The board decided to continue with the previous year's division of responsibilities in lieu of having a chairperson. Deana Tredeau will attend Parish Council and write vouchers; Dave McNeil will continue as treasurer and Bobbie Killilea as secretary; Kari Lynch is the Safe Church representative and will work on Fellowship with Jan Costa, who will also be the Called to Care contact, and Marcia Rich will run the meetings and continue as Memorial Fund Coordinator.

As Andrew participated after being on parental leave, the December 24th services were reviewed. All were considered to have good attendances, with over 100 people at the 4 pm service. There was some discussion of moving the late service from 11 pm to 10 pm next year.

The lay leader guidelines were finalized. Andrew is putting together a template to help lay preachers and others with worship planning, such as who is responsible for what parts of the service and where to find helpful resources. The deacons are also assembling a booklet of guidelines, policies and procedures for responsibilities that fall in the Board's area, such as communion preparation, weddings and funerals.

Andrew is preparing a three-session class for potential new members. Eight people have expressed interest; if you are interested and have not spoken to him, please contact him.

The labyrinth will be available for contemplative walking on three dates in Lent; see above article in this Hilltop for details.

Initial plans for Holy Week were discussed. The Presbyterians will join us for Maundy Thursday and they will offer an activity at their church on Good Friday. On Easter, worship will begin at 10:15 for decorating the cross with flowers. Four ushers will be needed for the service.

All are invited to help decorate the sanctuary for Easter on Saturday, March 30 at 9:30 am.

Called to Care continues to do a wonderful job with calls, cards, visits and meals.

Memorial donations have been received in honor of Rollie Damiani. Online giving has been set up for these and for the monthly love offering.

## MISSIONS UPDATE!



### RED WAGON

On March 31, Easter Sunday, please bring to worship what you can from the following list for our Burlington Pantry :

Pasta/Spaghetti-Pasta Sauce  
Canned Beans-Condiments-Jelly  
Cooking Oil  
Baby Wipes

You can also drop off donations at their location:  
21 Murray Ave., Burlington.



### CRAFTING FOR A CAUSE

We continue to meet on Thursdays at 1PM in the conference room. Our current projects are blankets for Project Linus. We have hybrid meetings. All are welcome to join us for conversation, laughter and relaxation.

### MISSIONS TREASURER'S REPORT

In February \$400 was paid to 10 benevolences:

- Casa Myrna
- Disabled American Veterans
- Habitat for Humanity
- Heifer International,
- The Hope Group
- LGBT Asylum
- MA Council of Churches (One Church Fund)
- Mission of Deeds,
- NE Center for Homeless Vets
- Project Care and Concern (Sister Joyce).

A donation of \$250 was made to the Peace Scholarship, a Burlington interfaith endeavor.

Missions is looking to add a couple of local organizations to the list of benevolences we support. If you have a suggestion, please let Joan Zink or Susan Eby know.

### MARCH 31 EASTER SPECIAL OFFERING

The annual Easter offering is split, 50% goes to the church and 50% goes to an organization suggested by Missions and agreed upon by Parish Council. This year 50% of your donation is going to the Burlington Pantry. Food insecurity has risen this year and your donation will be used to buy more supplies for the Pantry so they can continue their good work. There will be specially marked envelopes in each pew for your donations or on the table outside the office. If you prefer you can send a check to the church office. Please mark the memo line with Easter. If you would like to give digitally this can be done using Vanco. Information about Vanco can be found on the church web site.

### ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING (OGHS) MARCH 3rd

Our Church has 5 special offerings per year. The first of these offerings occurs on March 3<sup>rd</sup> during Lent and is the One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS).

The One Great Hour of Sharing's website states the following;

"One Great Hour of Sharing, part of Our Church's Wider Mission, is the special mission offering of the United Church of Christ that carries God's message of love and hope to people in crisis. The UCC works with international partners to provide sources of clean water, food, education and health care, small business micro-credit, advocacy and resettlement for refugees and displaced persons, and emergency relief and rehabilitation. One Great Hour of Sharing also supports domestic and international ministries for disaster preparedness and response.

On average, of every dollar given to One Great Hour of Sharing, 95 cents are used directly for mission programming; and 5 cents for interpretation materials."

There will be specially marked envelopes in each pew for your donations or on the table outside the office. If you prefer you can send a check to the church office. Please mark the memo line with OGHS. If you would like to give digitally this can be done using Vanco. Information about Vanco can be found on the church web site.

The Missions Committee thanks you for your thoughtful gifts

## NEWS FROM THE TRUSTEES!



### SEWALL HALL STAGE IS NOT A STORAGE AREA

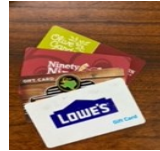
Occasionally, our rentals require the use of the stage in Sewall Hall for their events. This ends up being a clean-up event for Bobbie and the Trustees to clear the stage so it can be used by the rentals.

As a reminder for everyone, **the stage in Sewall Hall is not a storage area!**

For the people who have been storing their stuff on the stage, you need to remove it by **Saturday, March 16<sup>th</sup>**. Any items remaining on the stage thereafter will be disposed of.

Items intended for Church events (ex: annual auction, plant sale) can be left on the stage in advance of the event.

### GIFT CARD PROGRAM TIME TO ORDER GIFT CARDS FOR EASTER!!!



We have a very easy fundraiser that you may not know about - it is ordering Gift Cards through a program called "RaiseRight." When you order your gift cards through RaiseRight, a percentage of each card is donated to the church. You still get your Gift Card at full value, so no worries. It's a win, win for both!

If you order physical cards by March 10th, the cards will arrive here for distribution on Palm Sunday, March 24<sup>th</sup>.

When you use the RaiseRight Program, you may also purchase e-cards and even reload many physical cards. One of our members reloaded an Olive Garden physical card while eating out when she realized the bill was going to be more than the value of the card. It is very easy to use.

The gift cards don't really have to be a gift, they can be for your own everyday purchases, and imagine giving the church a donation every time you shop.

Some examples of how the church benefits:

If you give each of your four kids a Barnes & Noble \$25 gift card, it costs you \$100. The church gets \$8.00. The cards can be in the form of physical cards or e-cards. The physical cards you order will be shipped to our coordinator, Nancy Todd, who will pass them on to you.

Another example: You need a new spring jacket, so you plan to go to LL Bean. By purchasing it with a RaiseRight Gift Card, the church gets 16%. Wow!! That is \$16 for a \$100 jacket you were buying anyway. In addition, you can get gift cards for Stop & Shop, Shaws, and Whole Foods with the church getting a percentage when you buy food. Or what about that shopping trip to Lowes or Home Depot. The percentage varies by merchant from about 2.5% to 20%.

Using e-cards, you could get an e-card on your way out to dinner at one of the many restaurants that participate in the program.

#### **Here is the information:**

**To order, go online to [RaiseRight.com](http://RaiseRight.com), click on "join a program" and enter BB483284315L1 as your enrollment code (to link to our church account). Place your order online and leave a check (made out to UCC, Burlington) in the gift card order mailbox outside the church office. You may also pay by linking a checking account or credit card and there will be a small fee.**

If you have any questions please contact Nancy Todd at [nancygtodd@gmail.com](mailto:nancygtodd@gmail.com) She will be happy to assist you.

## SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS

Each Second Sunday a speaker will be at Sunday School to impart knowledge to the group, for instance: social issues, history, church policy etc.

**February 11:** We held our "Second Sunday Speaker Series" for 5th-High School. Kari Lynch from Deacons talked to us about all that the Deacons do to make our church service happen each week as well as coffee hour, decorating the sanctuary and so much more! Thank you, Kari!

**March 10:** How can I live Jesus's commandment to love my neighbor as myself? Our Guest Speaker will be Julie Lewis from People Helping People.

**April 14:** To be determined

**May 12:** **Change of time. The Speaker Series is taking us off site to Boston Common.** We will attend the weekly service held by Common Cathedral for all, especially people living on the streets. We will then walk over to the MLK Statue on the Common. Of course we will picnic on Boston Common. We will leave the church parking lot at 10:30 am and return by 1:30 pm.

For more information see their website: <https://commoncathedral.org/sunday-worship>

## NURSERY CARE

Nursery Care during worship is provided by two people for newborns – 4 years old.

**CE is urgently looking for a paid nursery attendant Sundays 10 am-12pm.  
This can be every Sunday or a job share.  
The candidate must be 17 years or older and will be CORI'd.  
Ask around, you never know who may be interested.**

## FREE Community Dinners at The Presbyterian Church (The Last Wednesday of the Month)



On January 31st our UCC / CE volunteers provided the UCC / CE sponsored the Community Dinner. It was a fun, lively Mardi Gras Party. Thank you volunteers and all the UCC people that made cookies! Thanks to all the UCC people that attended. Let your friends know what a great time you had!

## On Wednesday April 24 UCC / CE hosts Community Dinner

### THE THEME IS CINCO DE MAYO!



The menu will be meat tacos, with a vegetarian and gluten free option provided. An assortment of Mexican cookies for dessert. Please contact Deb Raymond, C:857-373-9156 if you would like to donate a dozen cookies. Recipes will be provided.

All CE and other volunteers should be at the Presbyterian church by 4:30 and stay until 7 to cleanup.

[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author

## MARCH EVENTS

### SUNDAY, MARCH 10, 11:45 AM SUNDAY SCHOOL PARENTS MEETING

Parents, come on down to the conference room to further discuss CE programming and how to be part of the community.

### SATURDAY, MARCH 16, 11 AM INTER-CHURCH LENT EVENT TO ASSEMBLE EASTER BASKETS

**Where:** UCC Sewall Hall

**What:** UCC Burlington will host this event for kids of all ages to assemble 100 Easter Baskets for underserved kids in Burlington. People Helping People will provide the contents for the baskets and will distribute the baskets to those kids in need. UCC / CE Burlington will host this event and provide juice and snacks for those helping with the baskets. Invitation extended to: Presbyterian Burlington, UCC Bedford, and UU Lexington. Kids/Youth, you are welcome to invite friends.

### SUNDAY, MARCH 24, NOON PALM SUNDAY PROCESSION!

Come begin Holy week at the Palm Sunday procession. The walk begins at St. Mark's Church and goes up to Simonds Park by UCC.



A mini horse and cart donated by Sandy at Farmers Helpers in Bedford, will lead the way on the .7 mile walk. Church will end a little early on March 24 to allow us to get down to St. Mark's church to start the procession.

Everyone bring your palms from church to wave in the procession!

### SUNDAY, MARCH 31, 9:45AM EASTER EGG HUNT

Join us in Sewall Hall at 9:45 for the Easter Story reading and then go on the hunt for Easter eggs! Kids and Youth, are welcome to invite friends.

## UPCOMING APRIL EVENTS

### SUNDAY, APRIL 7, SUNDAY SCHOOL COOKIE SALE

The kids and youth will meet at church at 10 AM to Bake Cookies! The cookies will be on sale after church by the dozen or 1 big cookie! Chocolate chip, Snickerdoodles & Macaroons. There will be a gluten free cookie offered.

### SUNDAY, APRIL 21, FROM 2 - 3PM POOL PARTY!



Pool party at Billerica Boys & Girls club of Greater Billerica located at 19 Campbell Rd. Billerica.

Be at the pool 5 min early so you can be ready to get in the pool at 2pm. There are girls and boys changing rooms. But you can come with your suits on and just leave your clothes in the changing rooms if you would like. **BRING YOUR OWN TOWEL.** Towels are not provided by the club. You are welcome to invite friends.

**YOU MUST RSVP to Deb no later that April 14th.**

If there are more than 20 people in the pool we need to hire another Life Guard. The pool needs at least 1 week's notice to hire another life guard.

## JOYS AND CONCERNS

Chris Stahlinski's sister Evelyn  
Barbara Leonard  
Anna Karwan's friends Ellen and Don  
Laura Nowell's cousin Nigel and friends  
Glenda and Mary  
Wayne Higden  
Brian Gionet's Dad  
Claire Simas and daughter Marianne  
Roberta Low  
Christa Brown  
Rebecca Sobolewski's sister, Holly  
Sheila Vitali-extra prayers  
Shirley Garside's daughter Lynn  
Bobbie Killilea's friends John and Lisa  
Jessy McNeil's sister Grace  
Elaine Glancy's friend Rita,  
sister-in-law Irene

Jim Killilea, Tom's brother  
Skip Glancy's sister Dorothy  
Joyce Carpenter's niece Cindy, brother Bob  
Marilyn Langley's brother Bill  
Lee Tirrell  
Kelly Sievert  
Bill Hitchcock  
Jan Blandino's grandson Toby, her  
Daughter Brenda and Son-in-law Rick  
Barbara Moran  
Ginger Mungillo's daughter Cindy and  
Ginger's son Jim  
Jean Bastos  
Barbara Garland  
  
Our Nation  
Mother Earth

## CONDOLENCES

Our deepest sympathy to Cindy Gilpin on the sudden passing of her dear brother Dana Healey. He will be missed by his family and many, many friends.

Our deepest sympathy to Kari Lynch and family on the sudden passing of brother-in-law David. Keeping you all in our thoughts and prayers.

Our condolences to Paul and Deb Raymond on the passing of Paul's brother Earl. He will be missed by many family and friends. Keeping you in our prayers.

Our condolences to Tonia Egan and her family on the passing of dear Uncle Jay. Keeping you all in our thoughts and prayers.



## MARCH BIRTHDAYS!

3	Cindy Brown
7	Barbara Moran
7	Paul Raymond
9	Logan Kelly
12	Laura Nowell
15	Stephen Jacobs
16	Thomas Omobono
17	Jan Blandino
17	Erika Downing
26	Laura Breau
26	Libby Samarjian
28	Alysa (Davis) Johnson
30	Rev. Andrew Harris

## SPECIALS THANKS

A Special Acknowledgement and Thank you to Theatre-to-Go for the donation of the chair rack and chair cushions. In addition, a Huge Thank You goes to Nancy Todd who volunteered and spent many hours attaching the chair cushions to the chairs in Sewall Hall. We appreciate Nancy stepping up and taking on this project.



## WORSHIP PARTICIPATION SCHEDULE

### March 3 Worship/Communion-LENT

Communion Prep: Marge Zamanian  
Pastor: Rev. Andrew Harris  
Organist: Aline Beck  
Lay Leader: Chris Stahlinski  
Head Usher: Dave McNeil  
Usher: Carol Downing  
Greeter: Sally Willard  
Flowers: Bobbie Killilea  
Collector: Marcia Rich  
Sunday School: Deb Raymond- Donna Ferro  
Nursery: Ally Mazzarella  
Coffee Hour: Deb Glancy  
Bakers: Deb and Barbara Leonard

### March 10 Worship/Love Offering-LENT

Pastor: Rev. Andrew Harris  
Organist: Brian Gionet  
Lay Leader: Debbie Claar  
Organist: Brian Gionet  
Head Usher: Deb Glancy  
Usher: Forrest Knowles  
Greeter: Sally Willard  
Flowers: Chris Stahlinski  
Collector: Joan Zink  
Sunday School: Deb Raymond- Donna Ferro  
Nursery: Mark and Donna Flecchia  
Coffee Hour: Chris Stahlinski  
Bakers: Chris and Ally Mazzarella

### March 17 Worship-LENT

Pastor: Rev. Andrew Harris  
Organist: Brian Gionet  
Lay Leader: Lucy Damiani  
Head Usher: Dave McNeil  
Usher: Chris Stahlinski  
Greeter: Forrest Knowles  
Flowers: Forrest Knowles  
Collector: Dick Butler  
Sunday School: Deb Raymond- Donna Ferro  
Nursery: **Volunteers needed**  
Coffee Hour: **Volunteer needed**  
Bakers: **Volunteer needed**

### March 24 Worship/Palm Sunday

Pastor: Rev. Andrew Harris  
Organist: Brian Gionet  
Lay Leader: Sally Willard  
Head Usher: Deb Glancy  
Usher: Lucy Damiani  
Greeter: **Volunteer needed**  
Flowers: Marcia Rich and our Palms  
Collector: Marge Zamanian  
\*Sunday School: Deb Raymond- Donna Ferro  
Nursery: **Volunteer needed**  
Coffee Hour: **Volunteer needed**  
Bakers: **Volunteer needed**

**\*Join us at noon** for a processional parade from St. Mark's Church up to Simonds Park by UCC led by Deb Raymond, a live Pony and groups from surrounding churches!

### March 28 Worship/Maundy Thursday 7:00pm

Pastor: Rev. Andrew Harris  
Organist: Brian Gionet  
Lay Leader: **Volunteer needed**  
Head Usher: **Volunteer needed**  
Usher: **Volunteer needed**  
Greeter:

### March 29 Good Friday at The Presbyterian Church

Time to be announced closer to the event

### March 31 EASTER SUNDAY












Sunrise Worship at 6:30am

Easter Egg Hunt at 9:45am

### Easter Festival Worship with cross decorating 10:15am

Pastor: Rev. Andrew Harris  
Organist: Brian Gionet  
Musician: **TBD**  
Lay Leader: Debbie Claar  
Head Usher: Dave McNeil  
Ushers (4): Sally Willard  
Lucy Damiani  
**Volunteer needed**  
**Volunteer needed**  
Greeter: Chris Stahlinski  
Flowers: From the Congregation  
Collector: Deb Raymond  
Sunday School: Deb Raymond-Donna Ferro  
Nursery: **Volunteer needed**  
No Coffee Hour Today!

# March 2024

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1	2
<b>3 LENT</b> 10:30a Communion <i>One Great Hour Of Sharing</i> (OGHS)	4 <b>6:30p AA</b> 7p Trustees	5	6 2p Bible Study 7:15p Choir	7 9-11a True North Hours 1p C4C <b>6:30p Scouts</b>	8	9 <b>Turn your Clocks <i>AHEAD</i> before you go to bed!</b> 
<b>10 LENT</b> 10:30a Worship Love Offering 10:30 <i>Speaker Series</i> Sunday School  <b>4pm Labyrinth</b>	11 <b>6:30p AA</b>	12 5p HR Mtg 7p CE Mtg	13 2p Bible Study 7:15p Choir	14 9-11a True North Hours 1p C4C <b>6:30p Scouts</b> 7p Deacons	15	16  <b>4p Labyrinth</b>
<b>17 LENT</b> 10:30a Worship  Easter Plant order deadline!	18 <b>6:30p AA</b>	19 7p PC Mtg	20 2p Bible Study  <b>6pm Labyrinth</b> 7:15p Choir	21 9-11a True North Hours 1p C4C <b>6:30p Scouts</b> 7p Missions 8p Pub Theology @ Common Craft	22 <b>APRIL Hilltop Deadline!</b>	23
24 <b>PALM SUNDAY</b> 10:30am  Noon Processional at St. Mark's Church to Simonds Park	25 <b>6:30p AA</b>	26	27 1pm Easter Plant foiling 2p Bible Study <b>5:30p Community Dinner @ Presbyterian</b> 7:15p Choir	28 <b>MAUNDY THURSDAY</b> 9-11a True North Hours 1p C4C 7p Worship  <b>NO Scouts</b>	29 <b>GOOD FRIDAY</b> At The Presbyterian Church 	30 9:30a Decorate the Sanctuary All invited to help! 
<b>31 EASTER</b> 6:30am Sunrise Service   9:45am Easter Egg Hunt   10:15am Festival Worship 			10			

# SAVE THE DATE FOR OUR PLANT/CRAFT/BAKE SALE

## MAY 11TH!



Attention Crafters, Bakers, and Gardeners!



We are holding our Mother's Day Plant, Craft, and Bake Sale on Saturday, May 11th at UCC!

We are hoping you will lend your talents to the cause to make this another successful fundraiser. Last year we sold many spring and Mother's Day themed crafts, as well as lots of perennials and vegetable and flower seedlings. If you have empty pots to lend to the cause, or would like help digging up/splitting perennials in your yard, please contact Julie Lewis at [jalewis@gmail.com](mailto:jalewis@gmail.com). We will also be looking for people to make and package baked goods to sell that day. Look for sign-up sheets at coffee hour, or feel free to email Julie if you plan to contribute anything, or if you have questions. Thank you!

### EASTER PLANTS



Remember how beautiful the church looked at Easter? If you would like to donate a plant or two for our service this year on March 31st, the form is at coffee hour and in the newsletter. Plants are \$10 each and you can keep your plant, donate, or have the Deacons deliver one to someone who could use a little cheering up. Make payment to *UCC* and please add *Easter Flower* on the memo line. Return with form below to the church office. Deadline for ordering is March 17th.

### EASTER PLANT ORDER FORM

Given by: \_\_\_\_\_

In Memory /Celebration / Honor of: \_\_\_\_\_

No. of plants: **(\$10.00 each)** \_\_\_\_\_

I wish to keep my plant: \_\_\_\_\_

I wish to donate my plant: \_\_\_\_\_

I will deliver a plant: \_\_\_\_\_

I would like a plant delivered to a UCC member/friend \_\_\_\_\_

(Name of Person)



**Please return your payment to the church office by March 17.  
Payment made out to UCC and Easter Plant on the memo line.**

UCC Congregational  
6 Lexington Street  
Burlington, MA 01803  
Address Service Requested

**TO:**



## **MARCH 2024 HILLTOP NEWSLETTER**

**See attached Pastor News....**

## **NEWS FROM THE PASTOR!**

Dear friends,

This past Saturday, February 17, members of our church's leadership met for this year's Leadership Retreat. Chairs of boards and committees met to discuss plans for the coming year, assess and evaluate the state of our congregation, and imagine the plans that God has for our church in the near and distant future.

### **Addressing the Budget Deficit**

One of the main objectives of the meeting was to brainstorm thoughtful and meaningful ways to address our current budget deficit. We need to find a way to achieve long-term sustainable ministry. Our operating budget is already rather lean, so the only cuts we could make that would have a meaningful impact would be to cut staff or building expenses, both of which would greatly hamper the ministry we try to provide our congregation and community. This means that to address the budget deficit, the only way out is forwards: we need to bring in more money, and we could do this in three ways:

1. More pledges
    - a. Increased pledges from current members
    - b. New pledging units
    - c. More rental income
- More fundraising income

Coming out of the retreat, we plan to establish small task forces to explore how we can better generate rental income and fundraising income. These task forces will contact churches and nonprofits in the area that have been successful in these areas to research best practices. They will assess the programs and projects that we already have in place to see how we can maximize their effectiveness. They will also be tasked, with thinking creatively, about how we can bring in new renters and establish new fundraisers that not only generate income for our church, but also bring us closer together as a congregation and serve the community.

### **Removing Barriers for Committee Participation**

We also discussed the need to attract more volunteers to participate in church leadership. Many of our church committees are currently understaffed. A lot of the work of running the church falls on a disproportionately small number of volunteers and our volunteers tend to be older folks whose workload should (hopefully) decrease in coming years as younger people step into these roles.

We shared the things we love about serving on committees, which included getting to know people, feeling a sense of purpose, learning new things, and simply answering God's call to serve. We also shared some of the things we don't like so much including the personal disconnection of zoom meetings, the amount of work and responsibility, and the training needed to participate effectively.

With these things in mind, we tried to come up with a new set of guidelines that will, hopefully, lower the barrier for participation on church boards and committees. Here are some examples:

**Meetings will be scheduled at least a month in advance (and won't change at the last minute)**

All groups and committees should try to meet on the same day and time every month (ex. Second Tuesday at 7pm). If your committee is having a hard time settling on a day, make a point to plan your meetings a month in advance. Make time in your agenda to schedule your next meeting.

**All meetings will be 90 minutes or less**

The expectation is that the chair of the committee will plan an agenda that can be completed in 90 minutes or less. If certain topics or conversations are going over their allotted time, the chair should try to either resolve the conversation, table it for later, or push other topics off to a later meeting. Once meetings hit the 90 minute mark, wrap the meeting - even if you didn't get everything done that you hoped to get done. Use it as a learning opportunity for future agendas and meetings.

**All committees will make space during meetings for fun and faithfulness**

Make intentional time during each meeting to check in with one another. There should be devotional and prayer time at each meeting. Try to use this time to reinforce the beautiful, sacred, and rewarding aspect of this work rather than business as usual. Make it interactive and participatory so members get to know each other better.

**Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats**

One of the things we did was a SWOT exercise where we assessed our congregation's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Here are just a few of the things that came out of this exercise:

Strengths

-Our staff

We have a dedicated and hardworking staff that cares deeply about the church and together amounts to more than the sum of their parts.

-Welcoming, Open and Affirming

-Our church is one of, if not the most, open and welcoming congregations in town. Aside from our history of being an open and affirming congregation, we welcome all newcomers with open arms and hearts.

-Kind, supportive, generous

All who come to our church can expect to find a kind, supportive, generous congregation. Whether in times of celebration or difficulty, our congregation is there for you with cards, visits, phone calls, and food.

-Facilities

We have a large building with the capacity to hold different types of events and activities. Our history is a strength.

## Weaknesses

### Community Awareness (Marketing, PR, Signage, Communication Strategy)

- For a church that does so much in our community, a lot of it seems to go unnoticed by the larger community.
- Additionally, we struggled to identify how people from the wider community view our church. Do they know our name? Do they know what we do? What values are important to us?

### Budget Deficit

- Our church is in a difficult situation financially. We must address our budget deficit ASAP.

### Facilities

- Our facilities can be seen as a strength (as listed above) or as a weakness. Our building is expensive and requires quite a bit of maintenance.

### Volunteers

- Many of our committees are currently understaffed. A lot of the work of running the church falls on a disproportionately small number of volunteers. Our volunteers tend to be older folks whose workload should decrease in coming years.

## Opportunities

### Connect more with local publications like BCAT and Burlington Buzz

- This is a communication strategy that hasn't yet been maximized.

### Think further out geographically

- How can we reach out to people from surrounding towns - Woburn, Billerica, Bedford, etc.

### Welcome Materials for newcomers to church and town

- We could put together a brochure that better describes who we are and what we do. We could also include a small gift (bread? knitted goods?) that highlights our kindness, generosity, and spirit of welcome.

### Participate more in community activities

- Burlington Day, Truck Day, Halloween, Tree Lighting. Our church could have a presence at these town activities and informative materials to share with people.

## Threats

### Money insecurity

- Again, we have to try as best as we can to reach a more secure financial position.

### Encroaching Sunday morning activities

- More than ever before, activities are scheduled on Sunday mornings, whether it's youth sports, brunch, or exercise class. Sunday mornings are no longer the exclusive domain of churches.

DE prioritization of church

-Similar to the above point, church is no longer a major priority for younger generations of people.

Lack of diversity

-Our church, as currently constructed, is not particularly racially diverse. It also does not reflect the demographic makeup of Burlington.

As you can see, there are lots of opportunities for us this coming year, and I hope we can address some of them to grow our church and expand our impact in our community. While there are certainly some serious issues facing our congregation (and churches in general) we are confronting them head on and taking steps to usher our church into another century of ministry. There are a lot of good things happening here and many reasons to hope. As ever, I trust that God has plans for us. May we answer God's call with courage and joy!

Peace,  
Andrew