

May 2008
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W CROSS R D

“We have an opportunity to make America a better nation.” — The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., 1968

The past two months have opened some very sensitive feelings and deep hurts for people in our country, community and church concerning race in America. In fact, our own church denomination, the United Church of Christ, has been under scrutiny by many in the media and politics, and many of our own members have expressed concern about the relationship of our denomination and it's affiliation with Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, and its pastor, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright.

First and foremost, as a pastor, I would like to believe that churches are above the fray when it comes to the topic of race. But that is not true. In fact, because we hold our relationship with our churches and with God so deeply, the wounds can be deeper because that relationship is grounded in human feelings and ideals. As a pastor, I would like to believe that I myself hold no such prejudices against anyone and thus be able to be more like Jesus and follow the teachings of our Lord, but that is not true either. I, like all of you, harbor some resentments and have pre-judged, incorrectly, some people in many situations in my life.

The ideas that Rev. Wright has expressed so widely seen in 1 and 2 minute sound bites on talk-shows and on the Internet,

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can be very frightening, invoking anger and even more pre-judging of its meaning especially when the sound bites are taken out of context, cut off mid-sentence and debated without the entire conversation being heard. I was equally offended by the sound bites, as a Pastor of this church and the UCC and as a person. But what has happened since this controversy began speaks to me of the great opportunity we have as people of God to overcome our fears and educate one another in our belief and love for and of God.

We have the chance to educate people about ourselves and our church and our denomination in a way that very rarely happens. So much attention has been drawn to the UCC that now we have a chance to explain the love and belief we have in forgiveness and love and understanding, all which honor the diverse life experiences we have which requires openness to each others viewpoints. Notice I did not say agreement with each others viewpoints. It requires we listen and hear, to past hurts, injustices, false understandings and misguided decisions, which allow us a new way to gather together around the Table of our Lord to celebrate that very diversity that tears so many others apart.

Each church that is a member of the UCC is autonomous and self-reliant. The individual churches decide who their Pastors are and what theological stance their pastors are inclined to hold for their

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ministry. The UCC speaks “to” their

churches, not "for" their churches. We believe that even when we disagree on subject matter, that there is still room in our denomination for differing views because we come together at the Lord's Table. This is not a political endorsement; I like Senator Obama's statement "we are like family, but that means we still don't agree on everything." Trinity Church embraces Liberation theology, a theology from the viewpoint of the economically poor and oppressed. Since Trinity Church was founded by African Americans, they have a strong, shared sense of this liberation history, in their view point. In this light, the sermons of Rev. Wright fit the theological viewpoint of the congregation.

BUT WE ARE NOT EXPECTED TO BE THE SAME. I look at our church holding a more Mission oriented theology, teaching and sharing the love of Christ as what satisfies our souls. **BUT THEY ARE NOT EXPECTED TO BE THE SAME AS US.** The UCC points out that in all this, also remember the work that Trinity Church, under Rev. Wright's leadership, has done in the African- American community of Chicago with the homeless, with Aids Patients and other social justice causes.

This does not excuse what some may call the bigotry of Rev. Wright's statements, but does show that in this entire furor, we are educated and dedicated enough to the principles of our faith in God to understand there is some good work that has been done as well. The Rev. John H. Thomas, general minister and President of the UCC, was a guest on "Anderson Cooper 360" on CNN on April 3 to discuss the UCC's call for a scared conversation on race in the United States. You can watch the interview on the UCC website www.ucc.org. Rev Thomas has asked that the 10,000 pastors of the UCC across the nation

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use their pulpits to address the subject of

race on May 18, 2008. Sacred conversations are not easy but necessary. Our earliest churches were called "meeting-houses" where the great issues of the day were discussed and debated and where God's will was discerned. I welcome the opportunity and invite you to join us.

As an Open and Affirming congregation of the UCC, we are called to welcome all to our community and our faith, all who seek justice and fairness and love, regardless of race, gender or sexual orientation. This is a wonderful opportunity to share, together, a conversation with the people of God.

Peace.

RB

FIRST FOLKS

Congratulations to **Jeff Cibulski** who graduated from the New Hampshire Police Academy on March 28th. Jeff is an officer with the Lebanon Police force.

We send our condolences to **Cheryl and Dick Koch** and their family on the death of their nephew **David Woodworth** in California.

We also send condolences to **Sue and Richard Howard** on the death of Richard's uncle, **Fred Barron**.

Get well wishes go to **Shirley Sutton** who underwent heart surgery on April 7th at Tufts Medical Center in Boston. Shirley is now at Northeast Rehabilitation Hospital in Salem.

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We also send get well wishes to **Stelios Ambargis** who broke his arm in a ski accident. He underwent surgery on April 10th at St. Joseph's Hospital in Nashua.

Tyler Edwards Racca was baptized on April 13th. We send our best wishes to Tyler and his family.

A funeral service was held in the sanctuary on April 25th for **John Sousa** who died April 19th. We send our condolences to **Gertie, Brianna, Rebecca and Matthew**.

CONFIRMATION CLASS

After a year of study with Rev. Bill, assisted by Barbara Calabro and other church members and committees throughout the year, we will welcome the following Confirmation Class members into full membership and fellowship of our church on May 11, 2008.

Wendy Bean — daughter of Debbie and Robert Bean

Brian Coccoziello — son of Debbie and Dean Coccoziello

Elizabeth Collins — Daughter of Susan and Gary Collins

Hayley Cummings — daughter of Rebecca and Richard Cummings

Andrew Ferguson — son of Maureen and Rev. Bill Ferguson

Geordan Henderson — son of Wendy and Kenneth Henderson

Chelsea Howard — daughter of Lauren Lefavbre and granddaughter of Sue Howard

Emily Long — Daughter of Margaret and Michael Oxner

Nicole Olson — daughter of Jean and Richard Olson

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Shannon Oriole — daughter of Janne and Timothy Oriole

Connor Patterson — son of Deanna and Glen Patterson

Matthew Reppenhagen — son of Margaret and Thomas Reppenhagen

Mariah Webster — daughter of Nancy and David Webster

Danielle Winn — daughter of Deborah and Stephen Winn

PASTOR PARISH

The Pastoral Relations Committee (PRC) is a standing committee in the church that seeks to support and maintain an open and healthy relationship between our pastor and members of the congregation. The committee serves as an advisory group for our pastor and as support for our pastor's leadership. As an advisory group, the PRC shares ideas, hopes, expectations and concerns of the congregation with the pastor. As support for the pastor, the committee interprets roles, functions, and needs of the pastor to the congregation.

The PRC serves as a vehicle to promote a healthy relationship between the pastor and the congregation. This requires trust and confidentiality between our pastor and committee members. It also requires a well understood process to communicate joys and concerns to the pastor with the help of the PRC Committee. If there are any joys and concerns you would like to address with Rev. Bill or PRC members, please speak with them as we establish this important link in a healthy relationship for our Pastor and church.

Our PRC members are, Susan Collins, Don Hornbeck, Elaine Hornbeck, David Wilkerson, Ken Henderson, and Bonnie Moore.

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YOUTH GROUP REPORT

Our Youth Group members participated in a 30 Hour Fast program on the weekend of April 26 and 27. For 30 hours they pledged not to eat as they participated in service projects, were educated in hunger awareness and shared time together. Look for a full report in the June Newsletter.

CALLING ALL SUMMER CAMPERS!

It is time once again to think about a week of fun at summer camp. Our

denomination operates two camps - Horton Center in Gorham, NH and Geneva point on Lake Winnepausakee. The schedule is on the CE bulletin Board in Fellowship Hall. To register and view more information, please go to www.hortoncenter.org. Camperships are available to help defray the cost of camp. If you have any questions about summer camp, please see Cathy Miller or our camp coordinator, Cheryl Andrews.

BLANKET SUNDAY & TOOLS OF HOPE

This year, Women's Fellowship has decided to combine Blanket Sunday and Tools Of Hope Sunday. This will be held on May 18th. For a donation of \$5.00, a blanket or tool will be purchased through Church World Service and distributed where needed. Gift cards will be available for you to give to your Mother, Dad or special person telling them of your gift in their name.

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A SPECIAL INVITATION

Calling all Next Year Pre-Kindergarten Students: You are invited to spend some time in Sunday School in next year's class room. Step Up Day for next year's Pre-Kindergarten class is Sunday May 18. Hope to see you there.

SPREAD THE LOVE! STRENGTHEN THE CHURCH SPECIAL OFFERING

On Sunday, May 11 — Pentecost, Confirmation and Mother's Day — we will be receiving the Strengthen the Church special mission offering of the United Church of Christ. This offering builds the UCC's future. It funds new congregations and renews existing ones. It supports programs for youth and young adults and

nurtures current and future leaders. And this year, for the first time, it will aid the God is Still Speaking Ministry and its message of exclusivity. Direct to local Conferences, Local Church Ministries and the Still Speaking Ministry, Strengthen the Church gifts will help to create vibrant church communities of extravagant welcome. Thank you for your support.

WE ARE A "5 FOR 5" CHURCH
5 For 5 congregations fully support Our Church's Wider Mission — they give to Basic Support and all four special mission offerings. First Congregational Church has been recognized as a 5 for 5 church! Congratulations!

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THANK YOU! THANK YOU!

We have received "thank yous" from the New Hampshire Conference recognizing our support of "Our Church's Wider Mission" and for being a "5 For 5 Congregation" of the United Church of Christ in 2007. You can see our thank you certificates posted in Fellowship Hall.

STEEPLETOPICS

April was a very busy month at Steepletop for all of our classrooms. Our preschool classes were busy learning about the farm and the circus. In our Kindergarten classrooms the children were learning about weather and how April showers bring May flowers. They are also learning about metamorphosis and are patiently waiting to watch their caterpillars turn into butterflies. The kindergarten classrooms went to see the Pelham Elementary School for a tour. This was a very exciting day for all, hard to believe they are almost in first grade. When our classes return on May 5th, after April Vacation, the children will begin to get ready for the ending of the school

year. Some dates to remember are: May 16th- Early Release, May 21st- Teacher Workshop/ No School, May 26th- Memorial Day/No School.

We are continuing to accept registrations for the 2008-2009 school year. If you have a child who will be ages 3-5 by September 30th and are interested in enrollment for the Fall, please call the school at (603)635-2100 and leave a message for the Registrar.

**Submitted by,
Melanie Surprenant**

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FROM OUR CE BOARD

Vacation Bible School:

Rev. Bill will be coordinating VBS this year, which is planned for the week of July 28th to Aug 1st, for half days in the morning. We're looking for volunteers to help in several areas: Music, Teaching, Crafts, Snacks. Please contact any CE member or Rev. Bill if you can help.

We're also looking to have an informal Gathering for the kids once per month through the summer. We could use some parent volunteers to help out in the fun! Please let us know.

If anyone is interested in working in the Nursery for next year, please see any CE member. We're planning to schedule volunteers for 1 Sunday per month.

Schedule for May and June:

May 4th - NH School Vacation week - No Sunday School

May 11th - Mother's Day / Confirmation Sunday — No Sunday School

May 18th - Teaching Sunday

May 25th - Memorial Day — Gathering

June 1st - Communion Sunday — Last Sunday school class

June 8th - Children's Sunday

Sincerely,

Karen Dorman for the CE committee

WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP

Our Bake Sale and Greater Gift (SERRV)

Sale was very successful. We made over \$250 that will go to support some of our many mission projects.

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Thank you to all who bought goodies! Enjoy them and be doubly glad that you are supporting good causes!

Tuesday, May 27th, we will discuss "How To Get Unstuck From Your To-Do List." Laundry, dishes, chores take up so much of our time. How can we find time for the things we dream of doing? Come with your ideas and suggestions, and we'll figure it out together.

Cheryl Koch & Jean Robarge

PREPARED TO SERVE

This past February the New Hampshire Conference hosted the annual Prepared to Serve Seminar for New Hampshire member churches to come together to participate in worship and workshops of many different opportunities to serve God in our churches. Cheryl Koch, Alma Healy, Barbara Calabro, Maureen Ferguson and Rev. Bill attended as members of our church.

They attended the following workshops:
DEACONS AT THE EDGES ~ Presented by members of the 1st Congregational Church of Dunbarton, this workshop spoke of how smaller congregations can minister effectively to each other and the community, how church members may assist the Pastor in ministry to others.

HAS YOUR CHURCH GONE ON A RETREAT? ~ This workshop spoke of the wonderful opportunities that present themselves when a retreat is offered off-site, away from the church. The retreats can be anything from family trips to leaders only, or opportunities for the whole church to attend.

TURNING TOWARDS MERCY ~ This workshop dealt with the wonderful ministry and healing that is offered when

people pre-plan their funerals, advance

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directives, wills and proxies before they pass home to the Lord.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

~A workshop encouraging churches to engage in social justice action on behalf of homeless people and families, encouraging Bible Studies and community studies about homelessness and how we can help.

GREENING OF THE CHURCH ~ This workshop dealt with the theology, education, Church building and Community applications for Recycling and ecology. We will soon have our own recycling buckets for paper and plastic in the kitchen and Fellowship Hall.

MIND, BODY, and SPIRIT~ focused on being one with our bodies and the effect that positive thinking has during illness and times of stress.

ENDOWMENTS~ Something our Trustees have explored is creating an opportunity for a Church Endowment Fund to assist in future care of our own church. This workshop offered a basic plan for creating such a program.

INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS ~This Mission Education workshop offered the chance to hear the story of three International Missionaries who have traveled to Africa and Bolivia to assist in local mission work. The quote "If it's about money — give it; If it's about changing the heart — Go!" was especially powerful. We will be exploring ways to apply what we have learned to our own congregation. If you have any questions about any of the workshops, please speak with any of the participants who will be glad to share what they have learned.

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FYI

For those requiring hearing assistance, the church is now providing portable hearing aids that amplify the church's public address system. See Don Hornbeck prior to the Sunday church service, and Don will provide you with a personal ear piece which will become yours. Each Sunday prior to the commence of the service seek out Don and he will furnish you a portable radio receiver that you may plug your ear piece into and be able to adjust the volume to a personal comfort level. At the end of the service please return only the receiver to Don, so that he may maintain it with a fresh battery.

BY-LAWS

After almost a year of study, discussion and prayer, the By-Law Committee has completed proposed By- Law Amendments and invites you to participate in the next step of the process. On **Sunday, May 4th**, copies of the proposed By-Law Amendments will be available for our membership to review. To be responsible stewards, we will make these copies available to you via E-Mail, the Website, CD or with very limited paper copies.

On **Sunday, May 18**, following our morning Worship, we invite you to a Congregational Conversation about these By-Law Changes and updates. Members of the By-Law Committee and Rev. Bill will be available for the conversation and input/feedback from the church members. On **Sunday, June 1**, there will be a Called Congregational Meeting following worship for the purpose on accepting the By-Law revisions, pending the results of our conversation on May 18th.

As a Congregational people, our conversations are necessary and joyful

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when we understand our By-Laws help us focus and function as a Body of Christ. Please make every effort to attend these

meetings and add your voice to the conversation.

TECHNOLOGY UPDATE

New email list

We are in the process of setting up a new outbound email list. The goal of the email list is to notify members of timely and important information. For example, death of a member, important meeting reminders and snow day cancellations are examples. We will be very careful not to flood you with Pelham UCC emails. If you are interested in this service from your church, please send an email to list@pelhamucc.org. Please include your name in the message. Sometimes it is difficult to tell from an address who that member is. You may say that I have already provided you with my email. In order to ensure that we have fresh and accurate addresses, we need you to send an email to list@pelhamucc.org if you want to be on the list. And when your address changes, please let us know. Thanks and we will let you know via email when the service is up and running.

HTML Developer

We need someone with HTML coding experience to help out with maintenance of pelhamucc.org website. We are looking for someone with experience, we simply don't have the time to train anyone at this time. Please send a message to steve@blanchard.com if you are interested and help us out. Thanks!

Steve Blanchard

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HILLSBOROUGH ASSOCIATION

*The Hillsborough Association
The New Hampshire Conference
United Church of Christ*

A Call To
The Annual Meeting of
The Hillsborough Association
Sunday, May 4th, 2008
First Congregational Church, UCC
Pelham, NH

Registration: 2:30 PM

Worship: 2:45 PM

Program: 3:00 PM

Rev. Gary Schulte,
NH Conference Minister
"Vital Conference Ministry"
3:20 PM

Discussion Groups &
Reports

Business: 3:50 PM

Refreshments & Fellowship time to follow
adjournment of meeting.

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COMMUNITY NOTES

The New Greeley Singers invite you to their 11th Annual Spring Concert, to be held at the First Congregational Church

on Saturday, May 3rd, 2008 at 7 PM. Free
to All!

Special Guests ~ The Pelham Memorial
School Chorus

Donations will be accepted and a
contribution will be made to the Sherburne
Hall Fund.

Reception following with refreshments
provided by the Sherburne Hall
Committee.