

# TOWER NOTES

Centre Congregational Church (United Church of Christ)

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The Rev. Mark Freeman Strickland, Pastor Emeritus

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Susan Spear & Barbara Langill, Secretaries

*We Welcome Everyone: An "Open and Affirming" Church*

**February 10, 2020**

## **Returning the Favor**

In her new book, *Grateful: The Subversive Practice of Giving Thanks*, Diana Butler Bass outlines two concepts of gratitude that we should consider as we commit ourselves and our resources to the mission and ministries of Centre Church. The first is the system practiced in the Roman Empire that still pervades our culture today. It is a system where the expectation of the generosity of the emperor also carried an expectation of tribute back up the line to the emperor. I am guessing that each and every one of us have, at some point or other in our life (or perhaps always), feel the need to "return the favor" when we are the beneficiaries of someone else's generosity! I can also say with certainty that there have been times when I have noticed an internal expectation of reciprocity when I have been generous to someone else. You, too? Dr. Bass points out that this system makes our generosity transactional and colors our gratitude as expected or even commanded. It rings hollow, just like a demanded, "I'm sorry."

In the economy of the kingdom of God, we are instead inspired to a generosity that is "pro bono." This is the reversal represented in the story of the Magi. In the Roman system, the peasant brings gifts to the ruler. But our Gospel story tells us that it was the other way around. We also live out this model of generosity where we are all equal at Christ's table, where all are welcome and equal in the eyes of our brother Jesus and each other. In our worship, every time we share the bread and the cup, we join together in practicing gratitude for God's never-ending flow of abundant grace and blessing. It is here, among the communion of saints, living and dead, that we realize that we can never "return the favor" to God, nor is God asking us to. What could inspire our gratitude more than that? And from an attitude of gratitude, it

is but a small step into our own generosity! God could love nothing more than each of us living up to the Godly image we bear.

Stewardship is about "pro bono" generosity. It is planting a tree that you will never sit under. It is building a house you will never live in. It is gifting a cow that will never provide you with milk to drink. We give to the mission and ministries we have been called to as Centre Church without expectation of a favor in return. And when we do, our joy is unmatched! Time and again, the people of God tell their personal stories of transformation made possible by following the way of gratitude and generosity. Join us on Commitment Sunday, February 23<sup>rd</sup> when we will pledge ourselves and our resources to Christ's Way as we begin a new century of being the church in the centre.

Gratefully, *Rev. Nancy*

## **In the Sanctuary**

**February 16**

Morning Worship

Nursery Care

Church School Classes

**February 23**

Morning Worship

Nursery Care

Church School Classes

**March 1**

Morning Worship

Nursery Care

Church School Classes

## News from Around the Parish

Dear Friends,

We were delighted to find Judith Doe on our doorstep bringing flowers from the Sunday morning service. The bouquet is lovely and as fresh as the moment it arrived. Judith's visit was a special treat, catching us up on the latest Centre Church news.

We're looking forward to warmer weather, fewer flu bugs and clouds floating around so that we can venture out more!

Sincerely, Dick & Carol Carter

Dear Friends - Many thanks for the well wishes, prayers, flowers, cards, visits and food that keep arriving at our door step. I do believe my recovery has been sped along knowing so many of you are rooting for me. The beautiful altar flowers brought by Judith and Randy were a bright spot during the early days providing the just right spot of cheer and sunshine. Betsy Brown stopped by with a delicious bag of goodies that kept us well supplied for days. The numerous thoughtful and humorous cards keep us laughing. I am so glad to be part of the warmth of the Centre Church family. Hope to be back among you soon.

– Perry Hayden

I would like to thank Roy Sorli, Jeff Langill and my lovely wife Diane who all pitched in, on very short notice, to help me with the Bread and Roses food pickup while I was recovering from a few cracked and broken ribs.

Thank you very much, David Bjorkman

A big thank you to everyone who sent me cards, flowers, food and most of all, prayers. Your loving concern for me after my surgery is what has helped me heal much faster than expected.

Susan Spear

### Altar Flowers

The dates of March 15 and March 29 are available if you are interested in donating altar flowers. Please contact Margaret Waugh: [mcwaugh@aol.com](mailto:mcwaugh@aol.com) or 781-334-4031

### Holiday Craft Fair Meeting

Save the Date: After church on Sunday, March 8, we will review last year's event and begin planning for the 2020 Fair. All our welcome to join us as we look forward to another successful fair!

**Please Save Tuesday February 25<sup>th</sup>**

**[ALL DAY!]**

**11:30 AM until 10 PM for:**

**Our Give Back Event at**



48 Walkers Brook Road Reading, MA

**20%** of tracked dine-in and carry out sales will be donated to Centre Church!

Plan your church meetings, meet with friends, invite friends and neighbors!



### **Stewardship Campaign 2020**

Our annual Stewardship Campaign began on February 2 and will end on Commitment Sunday, February 23. If you aren't able to be in church on 2/23, please mail your pledge card on or about that date. Budget planning for the next fiscal year will begin in March, and it's essential to have accurate pledge data.

Packets that weren't picked up on Sunday, February 2 have been mailed. Please call the church office if you didn't receive your packet. If you are interested in online giving, you can visit our website. [www.centre-church.org](http://www.centre-church.org) and click on "Online Giving" on the bottom left of the homepage.

### **Gift Card Scam**

Be aware! There are scammers using pastors' names and fake contact info and reaching out to church members via text and email asking for gift cards to be purchased for an urgent need. This is happening to hundreds of clergy and churches across the country. Several local clergy friends and their congregations have been targeted.

Please know that I'll never ask you for a favor, or money, or gift cards in this way. And please be sure to let me know immediately if you receive one of these requests so we can report and stop this illegal behavior.

Rev. Nancy



### **Ash Wednesday**

Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return. On Ash Wednesday, as we enter our 40-day Lenten journey, we are reminded of our mortality. We pray: O Lord, we need your mercy and grace. You are the only one who can make us pure. Let us repent time spent on frivolous things and acknowledge our weaknesses. We turn our attention to you, know you are here with us, and rejoice in your presence of healing and hope. Join us at our Ash Wednesday service, **Wednesday, 26 February at 7:00 pm in the Chapel.**

### **Faith Formation**

#### **February 16**

Church School Classes

Footprints/Nursery: Ms. Allison and Ms. Alicia

Godly Play: Ms. Lisa and Ms. Katie S-G

Brick by Brick: Ms. Jackie and Ms. Katie H.

#### **February 23**

Church School Classes:

Nursery: Ms. Alicia & Barbara Langill

Footprints: Ms. Alison & Volunteer Needed

Brick by Brick: Ms. Jackie and Ms. Katie H.

Godly Play: Ms. Lisa and Ms. Katie S-G

Youth Group 5:30 p.m. (Rising 5<sup>th</sup> Graders –

Rising 9<sup>th</sup> Graders) – Fireside Room, Service

Dog Project Planning & Pizza

#### **March 1**

All Ages Mini Muffins, Learning about Heifer

International: Ms. Larainne/Ms. Shelley

(Kitchen)

Communion

#### **Volunteer Needs:**

We have a need for Nursery (ages 0-4) and Footprints (ages 3-5) volunteers.

We are looking for volunteers to help us run stations at our Autism Awareness Event on Saturday, April 4th. Thank you to Betsy R. for being the first parent volunteer!

**Church School Pick Up:** Pick up time for church school is 11:15 (except on the rare occasion the service runs later than 11:15). If you have a child in Brick by Brick & another child in Footprints, Godly Play or Nursery, they will be brought to the Fireside Room at 11:10 so that you can pick them up on your way to the other classroom. We are trying to make the 11:15 a.m. pick up time easier for families with multiple children and we welcome your feedback.

**Joyful Noise:** We encourage your school-aged child to join in the practices and sharing of songs during the service. See Lauren Donadio or email her at ([laurendonadio@gmail.com](mailto:laurendonadio@gmail.com)) if you have questions.

#### **Next FFMT Meeting**

Our next meeting is Tuesday, March 10, 2020 at 6:30 p.m. Any interested parent is welcome to join us. We typically meet on the 2nd Tuesday of the month at 6:30 p.m.

#### **Looking Ahead/Save-The-Date!**

**March: Lenten Muffins** – All 5 Sundays in March!

**April 4<sup>th</sup>: Autism Awareness Event: Centre Church, time is TBD.**

**April 5<sup>th</sup>: Palm Sunday - Procession from the Common, Cantata, Children in Service**

**April 12<sup>th</sup>: Easter, Children in Service**

#### **Children's Sunday:**

We will hold Children's Sunday on **June 7, 2020** and the theme will be "Caring for Creation". We will be putting together a service that integrates our year-long focus on Creation Care. Ice Cream Sundaes will be on the menu for coffee hour.

**Summer 2020:** Our nursery is open all summer (and year-round). We will also offer an all-ages class "An Awesome Adventure" for children in grades K-6 each week in the summer.

## Mission & Outreach Ministries

The next meeting of the M&O Team will be on Feb 25 7pm, at Anthony's Coal Fired Pizza, during the church fundraiser.



### Love Packages

*“Putting the Word of God into hungry hands all over the world.”*

The non-profit organization Love Packages collects bible donations—as well as donations of Christian books, Sunday School materials, and more—from people and publishers across the U.S. and ships it to a network of distributors all over the world.

We are asking the congregation for donations of the following material, new or used:

Bibles, including New Testaments or other portions: Reference material (Bible dictionaries, concordances, etc.): all Christian nonfiction books for adults or children: daily devotionals (Upper Room, Daily Bread, etc.): Sunday School Materials: Audiovisual resources including CDs, DVDs, and BluRays: puppets, nativity sets, Bible games, biblical puzzles; anything that helps teach the Gospel

These materials will be sent to various countries overseas and distributed among pastors and people who do not have access or who cannot afford to purchase a Bible or other Christian literature. All items sent will be used. There will be a box in the Narthex for collection until March 29. For more information on this organization and the list of items they are looking for and **items that cannot be accepted**, please visit the website [www.lovepackages.org](http://www.lovepackages.org) or check the sign in the Narthex.

### Haven From Hunger

Our donations for February will be blessed in worship on Feb 23, “Green Wagon” Sunday and delivered to Haven From Hunger when we serve there on Monday Feb 24. Volunteers age 13+ can sign up to serve on the M&O bulletin board located across from the Fireside Room kitchen.

### Bread & Roses

Once a month, members of our congregation make and deliver a meal of our famous beef stew to Bread & Roses in Lawrence. We were recognized as a “Dinner Hero” at their supporter and volunteer recognition event on Friday, Jan 31. Please take notice of our “Hero” awards which hang above the sink in the downstairs kitchen.

### Calling all Environmentalists

Mission and Outreach Ministries is spear-heading the creation of a congregational “**Green Team**”. This group will work towards eliminating our church’s impact on the environment and educating our congregation and community on how to do the same as individuals. The United Church of Christ encourages this initiative with ideas and certification levels to indicate a congregation’s progress towards being “green”. If you’re passionate about recycling, composting, switching to sustainable sources of energy, etc. and would like to share your ideas on these topics, please sign up! Contact Linda Ladd for more information by emailing [green@centre-church.org](mailto:green@centre-church.org)

### Lenten Soup, Green Movies and Labyrinth

Coming in March, we will be hosting Wednesday night soup suppers followed by an environmentally-themed movie hosted by the new Green Team. These Lenten evenings will end with an optional walk on our labyrinth in the narthex.

### Fair Trade Goods

They’re not just for Christmas! The Mission and Outreach Team will now be selling a limited selection of Fair Trade coffee, chocolate and tea throughout the year, when they host fellowship after worship. Better still, these items will be sold at lower-than-catalog prices (\$3 candy bars, \$4 teas and \$10 coffee). The entire Equal Exchange catalog will also be available if people want to buy other items at catalog prices and are willing to wait until we assemble a \$75+ order for free shipping. The next time M&O is hosting fellowship will be on March 15<sup>th</sup>.

## *Our Opportunities*

<b>Sun. Feb. 16</b>	<b>10:00 am</b>	<b>Morning Worship– Sanctuary</b> Nursery – Room 10 Church School
Mon. Feb. 17	---	Church office is closed in observance of Presidents' Day.
Thurs. Feb. 20	1:00 pm	Bible Study - Fireside Room
<b>Sun. Feb. 23</b>  <b>Green Wagon Sunday</b>	<b>10:00 am</b>  5:30 pm	<b>Morning Worship – Sanctuary Commitment Sunday</b> Nursery - Room 10 Church School Middle School Youth Group- Fireside Room
Mon. Feb 24	3-6:30 pm	Serve at Haven from Hunger
Tues. Feb 25	11:30-10 7:00pm	Fund Raiser-Anthony's Mission and Outreach-Anthony's
Wed. Feb 26	7:00 pm	Ash Wednesday Service-Chapel
Thurs. Feb. 27	1:00 pm 7:30 pm	Bible Study – Fireside Room Choir Rehearsal – Choir Room
<b>Sun. March 1</b>	<b>10:00 am</b>	<b>Holy Communion– Sanctuary</b> <b>Heifer Muffins</b> Nursery – Room 10 Church School
Mon. March 2	7:00 pm	Parish Council-Pastor's Outer Office

**Church Office Hours – 9am – 3pm**

**Closed Monday, February 17 in observance of Presidents Day**

**February 18-21 9am-12 noon**

**The next Tower Notes will be on February 24**