



The Gargoyle

March, 2021

Founded in 1702 and located near historic Fort Griswold, we are an Open and Affirming Church. While our Hearts and Minds are always open, our doors are temporarily closed due to the pandemic.



The Groton Congregational Church
162 Monument St.
Groton, CT 06340
860-445-7409
www.grotonucc.org



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MESSAGE FROM OUR PARISH VISITOR

I would like to take this moment to thank Beth Chirillo and the members of the Mission's Committee for the lovely Valentines which were forwarded on to them. "Thank You" from All.—Connie Stoddard.

If you know of anyone in need of a phone call or a visit, please contact Connie Stoddard or the church office.



David Bryte 03/07

Alma Dougherty 03/14

Gus Hagar 03/01

Mary Healy 03/14

Cathy Johnson 03/11

Ellen Kerr 03/16

Gay Lambert 03/30

Jonathan Lambert 03/07

Lisa Lambert 03/07

Jonathan T Lambert 03/20

Joshua Measimer 03/23

Nancy Moffat 03/05

Henry Shepherd 03/26

Burt Turner 03/19

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February 23, 2021

DEFOGGING OF THE CHURCH
March 22 - March 28, 2021

TO: All Church Members and Friends of the Church

I am pleased to announce that the Defogging of the Church will commence on March 22nd through March 28th. The church will open for business at 9AM, Monday, March 29th.

During the Defogging Shut Down, **NO ONE WILL BE ALLOWED INTO THE CHURCH.**

The mailbox will be opened daily and mail distributed to the addressees.

The church staff has been apprised of the operating procedures during this time.

If need be to place a call to the Office, please leave a message and your call will be returned.

I am sorry for any inconvenience this may cause; however, when the Defogging has been completed, we can all look forward to a cleaner and healthier church.

Blessings to All,

/Connie/

Connie Stoddard

Weekly Meetings



Sunday Worship Service

March 7th, 14th, 21st, and 28th

While our doors are closed due to the pandemic, services are uploaded to our [YouTube Page](#) and [our website](#) each week.



Sunday Coffee Hour

March 7th, 14th, 21st, and 28th

11:30am via Zoom



Wednesday Prayer Meeting

March 3rd, 10th, 17th, 24th and 31st

5:30pm via Zoom



Community Meals Grab n Go

Sundays Noon to 12:30pm



Monthly Meetings

Women's Fellowship

March 10th 12:30pm in Dutton Hall Bring fresh ideas for future ventures. Spring is around the corner and we need to get busy. It's been a long winter. See you all soon. Sally

Music

March 9th 6:30pm in Dutton Hall

Deacons

March 9th 5:30pm via Zoom

Trustees

March 2nd 5:00pm via Zoom

Search Committee

Mondays 7pm as needed



We are in the process of updating the Church Directory. If you have moved, changed your phone number/email address, or do not want your information to appear, please contact the office to update your information. Thank you.

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Worship Watch

<u>Third Sunday in Lent</u> March 7, 2021 <i>Sermon: "Fools For Christ"</i>	<u>Exodus 20:1-17</u>	<u>Psalm 19</u>	<u>1 Corinthians 1:18-25</u>	<u>John 2:13-22</u>
<u>Fourth Sunday in Lent</u> March 14, 2021 "For God so loved the world"	<u>Numbers 21:4-9</u>	<u>Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22</u>	<u>Ephesians 2:1-10</u>	<u>John 3:14-21</u>
<u>Fifth Sunday in Lent</u> March 21, 2021 <i>"The law of love"</i>	<u>Jeremiah 31:31-34</u>	<u>Psalm 51:1-12</u> or <u>Psalm 119:9-16</u>	<u>Hebrews 5:5-10</u>	<u>John 12:20-33</u>
<u>Palm Sunday</u> March 28, 2021 <i>Sixth Sunday in Lent</i> "Being Emptied"	<u>Isaiah 50:4-9a</u>	<u>Psalm 31:9-16</u>	<u>Philippians 2:5-11</u>	<u>Mark 14:1-15:47</u> or <u>Mark 15:1-39, (40-47)</u>

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Pastor's Moment

Pastor's Musings March 2021

Here we are in March 2021! It's been a year since we all received the word to close the churches and set up safety measures as we entered the reality of the Covid-19 pandemic. It's unreal that we are still in the lockdown but there is a light at the end of the tunnel.

On February 17, Ash Wednesday, we decided to offer a 'soft opening' of the church and invited people to come in to enjoy being in the sanctuary once again and have a brief time of prayer with me and mark themselves with ashes to experience the beginning of this year's Lenten Season. Those who arrived came with an open heart and mind and desire to ask for prayers from God, with the hope of experiencing a moment of grace. I pray that that was a gift that occurred. I know that others are hoping to have more opportunities to come into the sanctuary as well. We hope that will be a possibility soon as more and more of us receive the vaccines which mean we are better protected from the severe consequences of the virus. However, we don't yet know when that will be. In the meantime, we will continue to maintain the safety measures as recommended by the CDC. Stay tuned -for this will not be a rapid opening back to normal as we would all hope - but one with care to keep us all safe.

For this month of March, as we go through the season of Lent, a season of 40 days during which we are invited to walk more intentionally in our faith journeys and be in intentional dialogues with God, let us listen and watch our inner responses to the stories of Jesus' earthly ministry and his invitation to us to learn how to do likewise.

One of Jesus' most cryptic messages is: "The kingdom of God is within." How many years have people spent pondering that and publishing books on that message. For me - it clearly is one of his key proclamations and an invitation to each of us. Jesus knew that his earthly life was limited and hoped people would come and listen to hear his message and then be those who would help teach it to others once he was gone. Through the ages, it has come down to us and it is in our hands to make the choice to learn how to make it real in our own lives; not because we're special, but because we've realized there's value in living this way with God and humbling ourselves to receive the grace. Out of thanksgiving, then, we invite others into their own journeys and try to help them hear Jesus' words; not our own. The truth is: we all have free will ...and must honor the pace of each one's path.

In this year's Season of Lent, we can do more of that learning as we work with the intentionally selected scripture passages to guide us during our worship services and also the Lenten Bible Study on the Gospel of John. If you're interested in joining us for the study, we gather for a Zoom meeting on Wed nights at 6:30 PM. Please send an email to the office if you'd like to join us.

For this day, I thank you for your participation in the life of this congregation and the ways you offer your responses to Jesus' love and invitation to be his disciples and offer your love and serve in his name.

May God's peace and blessings be with you all in this holy season,
Rev. Lee A. Ireland

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Deacon's Message



"I do not want merely to possess a faith; I want a faith that possesses me."

-Charles Kingsley

Have you ever met or known someone who exudes humility and grace? Have you ever said to yourself, "I wish I could be like her/him", always ready to offer a kind word or a warm smile when trying to comfort someone in distress? I often ask myself how I can become more like them, what can I personally do to attain that humility and grace.

I have had the privilege to have people like this pass into and out of my life, not all of them clergy but certainly all of them seem to know what it means to be a child of God. They walk through life with a calmness and aura that shines brightly wherever they go. They wear their faith like a gleaming white garment that makes me want to stand close to them and be enfolded in the mantle of their light and warmth.

The one thing, it seems to me, which makes these people stand out is their devotion to God. They are fully engaged in their faith journey, not relying on anyone or anything but God. They nurture their prayer lives and feed their spirits with love, kindness, and service.

I recently read an article about how Jesus taught his disciples by showing them through his lifestyle what it means and how to be a child of God. The disciples watched how Jesus talked with people, comforted the suffering and healed the ailing. They learned by watching Jesus move from prayer to service.

I believe that God places people on our paths to show us and teach us kindness, humility, and grace. Just as children learn by seeing and doing, so do we. What can you learn from those people in your life and how will you nurture what you learn from them to help you on your journey?

Lent is a time of contemplation and reflection not only about Jesus' journey to the cross but also our own personal journey to the cross. It is a time for learning, growing in faith, and nurturing our personal relationship with God.

So, this Lent look around you and try to see if you recognize those people in your life, the ones who walk in faith and grace, and the ones you want to stand close to and travel with on this journey. We have such great opportunities to learn from one another how to be kinder, gentler, calmer and wiser, how to be children of God. I know there are people in my life, in our congregation who I want to walk this journey with, whose light I want to shine on me. Thank you all for being those lights in my life.

And so, as we continue to navigate through the pandemic and the impact it has had on our lives both personally and spiritually, I would like to offer a prayer of thanks for you and your faithfulness.

It is difficult to feel and remain connected to the church when we cannot be in community with one another. This is when we must rely on God's ever-present love for us and the faith that we have placed in Him that all will be well.

The deacons, Reverend Lee and other members of church leadership are exploring ways to bring meaningful offerings to you for Holy Week and Easter, and as soon as firm plans are in place we will let you know.

Light, peace and love,

Sue Blaisdell



Music Committee

The Music Committee reminds all interested members and friends that, "Your musical gifts are welcome!" Please contact our Director of Music Sue Stottlemeyer if you would like to share a piece or participate in the musical offerings for Lent and Easter. Thank you and may God bless you through this holy season.

Janice Kimball, chair
Music Committee



Mission's Moment



Thanks to all who donated valentines!

We distributed 180 which were dropped off to Fairview, our "Drive by meals", and shut ins. Plus an email Valentine to all on church list. It was a fun new thing to do and we hope it brought as many smiles to all as it did to us!

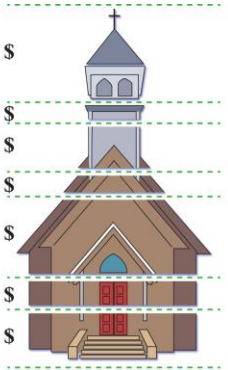
Your Missions Committee
Beth, Anne, and Penny

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Financial Update

Some Good News and Some Concerns



Everyone will surely be glad to hear the good news that Groton Congregational has been keeping ahead of the bills. It would be even better news if I could guarantee that we will be secure financially in the long term. However, the income will not keep up with the “out go” forever and, barring big changes, it seems certain that we will have to draw down on our investments later this year.

We received a loan from the federal Payroll Protection Program (PPP) last year, which enabled us to keep full staff on board through July 31, 2020. Without the PPP loan we would have had to dip into the investments for over \$15,000 or cut back on

staff. Paperwork has been submitted to have our loan forgiven and it looks promising that it will happen. We also received a \$1,000 grant from the State of Connecticut to cover utility costs. We do not now have any other similar loans or grants in the pipeline.

It must be pointed out that few of our expenses are reduced by pausing in-person worship. Remember the Church, although not the church building, is still open and serving the congregation. There are even some increased expenses. I will give you a couple of examples:

One thing is that we have higher costs for the internet. We upgraded to a more costly internet connection to upload weekly worship services to YouTube. We hold weekly prayer time and book group meetings on Zoom. Our Christmas Eve service on Zoom had quite a few members in attendance. The boards and committees also meet that way. Zoom does not provide that service for free.

Another increased expenditure is for bookkeeping. We have hired a bookkeeping firm to administer our payroll. They set up direct deposit for our staff’s paychecks and prepare quarterly IRS and CT Department of Revenue tax reports as well the year-end W-2 and 1099 forms. Having been put in the position of being an acting treasurer I have gained a huge appreciation for all the work our volunteer treasurers have performed in the past. We do not have anyone now with the knowledge of accounting and the time available to perform those duties. Therefore, we have this increased cost of paying the bookkeepers.

Meanwhile utility costs have not dropped. We still need to pay for the copier, postage, etc. Payroll is equal to about two-thirds of the budget although we do not have a CE director on staff right now.

Hopefully, we will be able to have Sunday school again before the end of the year and that will increase staff expense.

One reason we have been able to cover our expenses so far this year is that some of you pre-pay your annual pledges. That gives us income to start the year in good shape. However, those early payments will gradually be used up and the monthly income will not keep up. It is therefore important for everyone to keep their pledge payments as up to date as possible and delay any draw down from our investments.

We have continued to operate using last year's budget, but with adjustments to realities, like the increase in bookkeeping and internet costs and the shortened term of employment for a CE director. All that being said, it looks like we need about \$150,000 to \$155,000 for church operations this year. Stewardship is reporting something just over \$95,000 in pledges. There is some other income in addition to pledges. We will have \$4,500 in income from our investments. When donations are received from people who have not pledged it is called "plate donations", but that line item of income would obviously be quite a bit higher if we were able to open the sanctuary to regular Sunday worship services.

If I may add a personal note, off topic from financial stuff, I thought the dispensing of ashes on Ash Wednesday was went very well even with the social distancing procedures. It meant a lot to be able to receive the ashes with other members of the congregation also in the sanctuary. Thank you to Pastor Lee and all who helped make that possible. After all, it is for the nourishment of our spiritual life that we financially support the church.

To end this note, I just want to urge that we all maintain the discipline, spiritually, as well as financially, to keep the church virtually open and ready to physically reopen as soon as it is safe for all.

God bless us all.

Bill Blaisdell

Acting Sorta-kinda Treasurer

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Property Committee Message

Church Maintenance Continues

Despite COVID-19 things are moving along at Groton Congregational. Here are some of the things accomplished during 2020:

- The louvred vents in the tower have been restored.
- The door frames around the front doors that were partly bare of paint and showing split wood have been restored to like new.
- The red emergency door in the basement that was rusted and didn't work properly has been replaced.
- The underground fuel oil tank on the north side of the church has been replaced with a tank in the furnace room. This was done in hope of avoiding the financial disaster of cleaning up oil leaking into the ground.
- Complaints about air quality in the basement led to looking for mold, but none was found. Instead, it was found that by installing a better grade filter on the air handler and running the air circulation continuously, the problem went away.
- The UCC sign at the corner of Meridian and North streets directing people to our church was found lying on the ground. Many thanks to Groton City for putting it back up for us.
- Rug Protective Agency inspected the alarm equipment in the church.
- Encore Fire Protection tested and serviced our emergency signs and lights, plus the Ansul System fire extinguishing equipment in the hood over the kitchen stoves. Since the church is closed, we have put future visits by Encore on hold. We will contact them for an Ansul System inspection before our next church dinner, and we will do the emergency light and signs annual inspection ourselves. This will save a significant amount of money.

Additionally, our regular maintenance items are being completed. The lawn is being mowed, the leaves were picked up, the snow is being shoveled. The hedge was cut back with a lot professional and volunteer help. The sanctuary storm windows were taken down in the spring and put back up in the fall. The church kitchen and bathrooms are cleaned weekly. The floors are vacuumed or cleaned regularly.

If anyone would like to help (volunteer labor or financial) with this work or any other much needed projects, please contact Dick Stottlemeyer at 860-235-6542.

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Stewardship Message

“The building may be closed, but the church is not”

Wow: it’s been almost a year that we’ve been in a full-blown pandemic and been unable to meet in-person in our church building. But: that didn’t stop us from conducting (remote) church services, including music; reaching out to our community through our many missions; maintaining the physical church building, keeping our youth (virtually) engaged, etc. If you haven’t already, we encourage you to read the 2020 reports submitted by the church’s various committees as these provide, in greater detail, what was done collectively as the body of Groton Congregational Church. The reports can be accessed via the church website member portal.

One of the reasons we’ve been able to continue to *be* the church is through continued stewardship. Thank you for your continuous and consistent stewardship to Groton Congregational. New and increased pledges are always received and accepted with the gladness in which they are given.

As we enter the season of Lent, we reflect and prepare for the celebrations of Easter, and we have hope. Reverend Lee has asked us, “What is your hope? Why do you have hope?” All of us are probably hoping for the day when we can once again come together physically as a congregation. We have a feeling of expectation and a feeling of trust. Ponder these questions and perhaps act upon them.

The Lord watch between you and me, while we are absent, one from the other (Genesis 31:49).

May God’s blessings be upon you.

Your Stewardship Committee,
Cathy Johnson
Sue Stottlemeyer
Phyllis Meyer

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SNEC Moment

Connections & Common Bonds in a Sacred Space for Young Adults

2/10/2021 - by: [Kristin Putney](#)

You may be in your 20's or 30's and ready for a night out, connecting with friends. You may be a young adult in need of some deep conversation about the mysteries in life and the spiritual connections that have impacted you. You may be a Millennial and want to network with others to support a current global issue. Perhaps you are fresh out of college and looking to belong to a new circle of friends. Or you may know of a young person, like the above, that at this time of social distancing, needs to connect with others for friendship and fellowship. Millennials' Ministries provides all of this and more!

Katie Howe, a young adult member of the Woodridge Congregational Church, RI, initiated the original Millennials' Ministries gatherings in October 2018, with young adults from churches of the historic RI Conference. ([Read that story here.](#)) A variety of monthly experiences were planned according to the season: pumpkin carving, apple picking, Christmas gift swap, game night and bowling. Originally from New Hampshire, Katie was eager to meet new people from RI but realized it was challenging to find a Millennial church community. "I have noticed that young adults don't tend to see their demographic represented in their local church. Millennials' Ministries is a reminder that people in their 20s and 30s exist within the UCC even though we may not be as visible in each of our churches."

Fast forward several years and a lot has changed since then! Now into its third year, two impactful situations changed the shape of Millennials' Ministries. The first occurred in January 2020 with the merge of three conferences into the Southern New England Conference. The second arrived in March 2020, with the pandemic restrictions prohibiting in-person gatherings. However, the COVID guidelines inadvertently provided a new virtual gathering space on a zoom platform and the new expanded regions promoted a broader reach to invite young adults from all areas of RI, CT, and MA.

The Millennials' Ministries group has had six virtual gatherings since the pandemic began with young adults from all three states attending frequently. Vicky Allen, a member of First Church in Middletown, CT, began attending the group in July 2020 at the first virtual meeting. "I love that Millennials' Ministry is accessible across SNEUCC; it's been great connecting with people from all three states. I also love the wide variety of activities we've been able to pull off over Zoom--the murder mystery was especially fun!"

There have been a variety of topics and themes that keep the virtual event exciting and relevant. Emily Carle, a senior in college, and member of First Congregational Church of South Hadley, MA, enjoys connecting with new friends to discuss issues that make one ponder: Do you believe in miracles? Or themes that make one laugh: Dressing up for the virtual mystery skit in January 2021! "I'm so happy that I found Millennials' Ministries. It has been a sacred space for young people within the church to be ourselves, talk about the topics that interest us, and even have some fun! Between our more serious Dessert and Discussion nights to our "Whodunit" Zoom Murder Mystery party, Millennials' Ministries has something for everyone."

Sharing conversations about the presence of God bring on engaging dialogue. The zoom platform offers the opportunity to create breakout rooms for smaller, more intimate circles for sharing. Jeff Noble, a young adult member of the Seekonk Congregational Church, MA, feels these gatherings are a great chance to interact with "like-minded Christian Millennials". Lily Clarke feels the same sentiment, a young adult from the United Congregational Church of Little Compton, RI. "I've met people who share a common bond with me of having a

strong faith. Our discussions are rich in experience and I always come away feeling more whole and more connected to God than I did before. I feel as though I'm able to share my faith on a deeper level with a community that's in my age group which is so different from my Church family as I'm a younger member in my Church."

Millennials' Ministries events will continue to be creative and inviting and ***meet once a month on the second Thursday, from 7pm-8pm.*** Join them or share more about this opportunity with a young adult you know. Upcoming themes and topics are:

March 11 - [A Virtual Paint Party! \(guided by artist, Kristin Putney, supplies needed prior - see list for details\)](#)

Millennials' Ministries is a great space for connections and common bonds for young adults who are looking for a Christian community of friends to engage with. The Gen Z community, who are now approaching young adulthood, are encouraged to join in and some have already been participating in these events. The connections made among each of these 20's and 30's age groups allows everyone to feel seen, heard, and valued. Each young adult gives and receives without judgement. It is a sacred space and for now, it is their own unique and interactive virtual gathering space.



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Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation

From the Center for Action and Contemplation

Week Eight: Wisdom A Seminary of Life

To understand the world knowledge is not enough, you must see it, touch it, live in its presence. —Teilhard de Chardin, Hymn of the Universe

Suppose a superstar of knowledge moves into your house as a boarder. With three PhDs after his name, he sits at your supper table each evening dispensing information about nuclear physics, cyberspace, and psychoneuroimmunology, giving ultimate answers to every question you ask. He doesn't lead you through his thinking process, however, or even involve you in it; he simply states the conclusions he has reached.

We might find his conclusions interesting and even helpful, but the way he relates to us will not set us free, empower us, or make us feel good about ourselves. His wisdom will not liberate us, it will not invite us to growth and life; indeed, it will in the end make us feel inferior and dependent. That's exactly how we have treated Jesus. We have treated him like a person with three PhDs coming to tell us his conclusions.

This is not the path to wisdom nor is it how Jesus shared his wisdom with those who wanted to learn from him. Rather Jesus teaches his disciples through his lifestyle, a kind of "seminary of life." He takes them with him (Mark 1:16–20) and watching him, they learn the cycle and rhythm of his life, as he moves from prayer and solitude to teaching and service in community. As Cynthia Bourgeault explains in her book *The Wisdom Jesus*, he taught as a *moshel moshelim*, or a teacher of wisdom. [1] He doesn't teach his disciples mere conceptual information as we do in our seminaries. Rather, he introduces them to a lifestyle and the only way he can do that is to invite them to live with him. He invites us to do the same (see John 1:39).

"But the crowds got to know where he had gone and they went after him. He made them welcome and he talked to them about the kingdom of God and he cured those who were in need of healing" (Luke 9:11). Can't you just see the apostles standing at Jesus' side, watching him, noticing how he does things: how he talks to people, how he waits, how he listens, how he's patient, how he depends upon God, how he takes time for prayer, how he doesn't respond cynically or bitterly, but trustfully and yet truthfully? Can you imagine a more powerful way to learn?

Luke tells us that Jesus walked the journey of faith just as you and I do. That's the compelling message of the various dramas where Jesus needed faith—during his temptation in the desert, during his debates with his adversaries, in the garden of Gethsemane, and on the cross. We like to imagine that Jesus did not doubt or ever question his Father's love. The much greater message is that in his humanity, he did flinch, did ask questions, did have doubts—and still remained faithful. This is the path of wisdom.

[1] Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Jesus: Transforming Heart and Mind—A New Perspective on Christ and His Message* (Shambhala: 2008), 23.

Adapted from Richard Rohr, *What the Mystics Know: Seven Pathways to Your Deeper Self* (Crossroad Publishing: 2015), 14, 108, 118.



March Calendar

March 2021

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1	2 Trustees Meeting	3 Zoom Prayer Meeting 5:30pm	4	5 World Day of Prayer	6
7 Sunday Worship & Coffee Hour 11:30am	8	9 Deacons Meeting 5:30pm Via Zoom Music Meeting 6:30pm Dutton Hall	10 Women's Fellowship 12:30 pm Dutton Hall Zoom Prayer Meeting 5:30pm	11	12	13
14 Sunday Worship & Coffee Hour 11:30am	15	16	17 St, Patrick's Day Zoom Prayer Meeting 5:30pm	18	19	20
21 Sunday Worship & Coffee Hour 11:30am	22	23	24 Zoom Prayer Meeting 5:30pm	25	26	27
28 Sunday Worship & Coffee Hour 11:30am	29	30	31 Zoom Prayer Meeting 5:30pm			

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The Gargoyle is a publication of the Groton Congregational Church
An Open and Affirming Church



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