



The Gargoyle

Pastor's Musings

By Rev. Lee Ireland

Greetings to you as we go into the New Year .

Yearly, we go through the Advent and Christmas services inviting us into sharing the liturgies we may have shared many times. Each stirring our memories of years' past - with family members close by and with those for whom we've let go into their new lives elsewhere or in God's realm.

Those memories help us to remember the origins of our faith and our congregation and can hold us back or encourage us to keep our focus on Christ and not all the distractions and worries of our daily lives. As we are encouraged by our walk with Jesus with this reconnection, we are to share it with others and witness the shining of the light of Christ in each one and encourage them if they've lost their way.

Each year I feel the tugs on my heart strings and look around during the services and see those who've also been touched and allowed the tears to flow as the meaning of the story has connected to them and opened them to a sense of God's love in that moment. These are moments to comfort and yet call to us to carry the message into the new year with a deeper conviction than we ever expected.

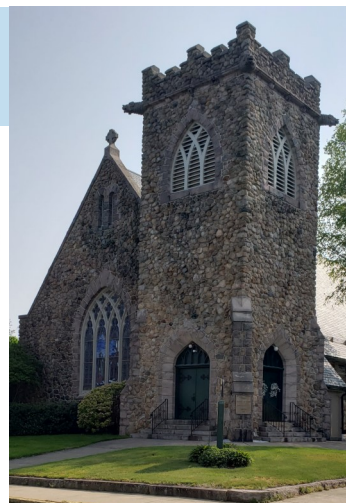
I give thanks for the gift of your presence during this Holy Season and I pray that as you go forward into your new year, you've been comforted and encouraged as well.

I close with these words from John O'Donohue offering his blessings.

Peace and blessings to you all as you walk together in God's love and carry forward the peace, light , and love of Christ,

Rev. Lee

(See poem on page 2)



In This Issue

Treasurer.....	3
Women's Fellowship.....	4
Deacons.....	5
Youth Group.....	5
Worship Watch.....	6
Calendar.....	7
Community Meals.....	8

Highlights

Birthdays.....	2
For a New Beginning.....	2
Shine Your Light.....	4
Holiday Music Plus.....	8
Night Work.....	9
UCC.....	10 & 11





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WOODRUFF

STACY WRIGHT

For a New Beginning

By John O'Donohue

In out-of-the-way places of the
heart,
Where your thoughts never think
to wander,
This beginning has been quietly
forming,
Waiting until you were ready to
emerge.



For a long time it has watched your desire,
Feeling the emptiness growing inside you,
Noticing how you willed yourself on,
Still unable to leave what you had outgrown.

It watched you play with the seduction of safety
And the gray promises that sameness whispered,
Heard the waves of turmoil rise and relent,
Wondered would you always live like this.

Then the delight, when your courage kindled,
And out you stepped onto new ground,
Your eyes young again with energy and dream,
A path of plenitude opening before you.

Though your destination is not yet clear
You can trust the promise of this opening;
Unfurl yourself into the grace of beginning
That is at one with your life's desire.

Awaken your spirit to adventure;
Hold nothing back, learn to find ease in risk;
Soon you will be home in a new rhythm,
For your soul senses the world that awaits you.

From the Treasurer



It is the Fourth week of Advent as I write this note. Week by week we have focused on the spirits of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love represented by lighting another candle in our Advent Wreath. During this season it would be another blessing to be able to completely push aside the temporal aspects of being a church treasurer. You will be relieved,

however, that this is not a financial report, but a note to thanks and hope.

For several years we have been operating with a budget deficit. I don't say this to be gloomy but as a way to introduce good reasons to be happy and thankful that we have been able to continue our activities. We are a small congregation, but we have generous members. When I am in the finance office at the church I see many other things going on, the craft group working hard, the grounds and building of the church being maintained by volunteer work, the gathering of the Bible study group and Women's Fellowship, the staff working hard, etc. My concentration is of course on the financial matters. I did not want to bore you with all the numbers of income and expenses – in only a few weeks the annual report will be issued. I just wanted to post a note to point out the hopeful signs that I see, to thank all of you for your giving spirit, and to urge everyone to continue in that spirit.

Merry Christmas,

Bill



Groton
Congregational
Church

*Sanctuary
Flowers*



Honor that special
person or occasion
with a floral
donation to the
Sanctuary. Contact
the church office
860-445-7409 .

Shine Your Light

You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.

- Matthew 5:14

+++++ +++++ +++++

Shine your light. Shine the light of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Don't hide it under the proverbial bushel.
Let it Shine. Let it Shine. Let it Shine.

In Jesus' name. Amen

Kevin Measimer

Women's Fellowship

Women's Fellowship met on December 13th for a delightful Christmas brunch. A Yankee Swap followed with great gifts for all. Our meeting was basically planning for Rev. Lee's reception following the December 31st service. We will be calling to ask for finger food and desserts to serve.

Our next **bake sale** will be on **January 7th**. Our next meeting will be in Dutton hall at 10 a.m.

January 10th. All women in the church are welcome to attend. We will look forward to seeing you.

Sally Turner



Deacons

A New Year

Doesn't everyone want a new beginning? Fresh starts bring out our creativity.

This morning I put on soft music, which is just what I needed after a rough night sleep to begin the day.

I opened my bible to Psalm 98 which speaks to singing to the Lord and his faithfulness to Israel, two very important thoughts for this year.

As we start 2024 let us pray for understanding and acceptance of all our brothers and sisters and remember to open our hearts to God's love.

Mary M. Alapa wishing you a Happy New Year

Youth Group

I can not believe 2023 has come and gone already! This year went by so fast.

Since September, Youth Group has been meeting consistently, playing games and watching movies. We have really enjoyed playing *Uno* and *Pass the Pig*, as well as watching movies like *Wonder* and *Space Jam*. It has been wonderful getting together and catching up each week.

Starting in January, youth group will meet every **second Monday of the month**, instead of every week. Still 6-8 pm in the Youth Room. I look forward to seeing everyone on **January 8th!**

Rachel Candee



Worship Watch

January Worship Services

January 7, 2024
Baptism of the Lord
 First Sunday after the
 Epiphany

Genesis 1:1-5 Psalm 29 Acts 19:1-7 Mark 1:4-11

January 14, 2024
 Second Sunday after
 the Epiphany

1 Samuel 3:1-10, (11-20) Psalm 139:1-6, 13-181
 Corinthians 6:12-20 John 1:43-51

January 21, 2024
 Third Sunday after the
 Epiphany

Jonah 3:1-5, 10 Psalm 62:5-121 Corinthians 7:29-31
 Mark 1:14-20

January 28, 2024
 Fourth Sunday after
 the Epiphany

Deuteronomy 18:15-20 Psalm 111 1 Corinthians 8:1-13
 Mark 1:21-28





Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1 New Year's Office Closed	2 Office Closed	3	4 Handbells 6:30pm Choir 7:30pm	5	2 Community Meals Noon to 1pm
7 Worship 10am Bake Sale	8 Youth Group 6-8pm	9	10 Women's Fellowship 10am	11 Handbells 6:30pm Choir 7:30pm	12	13 Community Meals Delivery Only
14 Worship 10am	15	16	17	18 Handbells 6:30pm Choir 7:30pm	19	20 Community Meals Noon to 1pm
21 Worship 10am Annual Meeting 11am	22	23	24	25 Handbells 6:30pm Choir 7:30pm	26	27 Community Meals Noon to 1pm
28 Worship 10am	29	30	31			

Community Meals

It's been a busy and rewarding time for the volunteers of Community Meals. Thanks to all whose gifts and labors made it possible to serve 5 meals to community and church family members during a busy December. Thank you all!!!

Out of respect to the family of **Rose Mary Ward**, longtime member and officer of Groton Congregational Church, whose **memorial service** is scheduled at the church for noon on **Saturday, January 13th**, **there will be no meal** served in Dutton Hall that day. Food will be provided by delivery to shut-in members and friends that same week. We will serve a meal on January 6th, and resume serving on January 20th.

Janice Kimball, for the volunteers



Holiday Music Plus

The "Holiday Music Plus" piano recital on Saturday, December 16th, at 3 PM in Dutton Hall displayed the pianistic talents of 21 young people and adults, to the enjoyment of 60 people, family members and friends as well as church members, in attendance. A wonderful variety of healthy finger foods provided by friends and parents of the students encouraged all present to stay and visit.

I would like to thank the Board of Trustees, the Music Committee, Director of Music Sue Stottlemeyer, the Community Meals volunteers, and additional volunteers (including our performers and friends) for supporting this annual celebration. God bless you all!!

Janice Kimball, music instructor

Night Work

By Rev. Molly Baskette

“We must work the works of the one who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work.”
- John 9:4 (NRSV)

Jesus apparently spoke these words, but surely he, best friend to nocturnal fishermen, knew they were wrong as soon as they were out of his mouth. God’s work is being done in darkness all the time.

I call insomnia my “alone time with God,” but truthfully, even in the middle of the night God and I are not alone. Amidst the sleepiness of 3am prayers, I remember all the other people who are awake with me. Not just the other insomniacs (I see you, friend) but:

Long haul truckers moving food. New parents nursing. Laborers making roads straight. Janitors making bathrooms fresh for a new day. Nuns and monks praying the offices. ICU nurses check patients’ vitals. Third-shift factory workers with children sleeping at home. Ministers fielding emergency phone calls. College students pulling all-nighters. Lovers making love, and whatever else they are making. And so many more.

Night falls and God’s people keep working, senses sharpened in the dimness, pushing their way through, sometimes praying their way through. They are the skeleton crew of our mortal striving, keeping the supply chain going, healing and fostering new life. Their deeds are witnessed by few or none, and still, they keep on, some in literal darkness, some in figurative darkness: laboring for a future we can’t yet know, unthanked and yet determined, moving their piece of the world toward wholeness.

Prayer

God, wake me once in a while to pray for all those doing your work in the dark.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rev. Molly Baskette is the lead pastor of First Church Berkeley UCC and the author of books about church renewal, parenting, spiritual growth and more. Sign up for her author newsletter or get information about her newest book at mollybaskette.com.

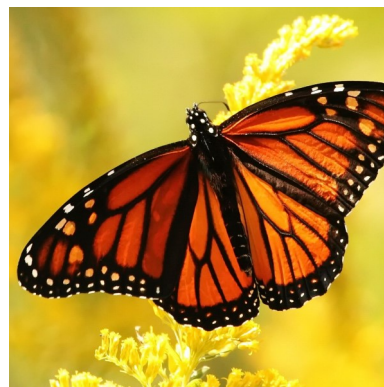


Raising Monarchs

By Rev. Mitch Nelson

The good soil in Jesus's parable of the sower is someone with a soft heart that remains in the love of God and yields much fruit. I share the following project with you this early winter because it was last year at this time that I began researching how to raise monarch butterflies in order to be prepared at our church the next year when they returned from Mexico.

There is one statistic that makes this project inspiring, especially if enough UCC churches and their neighbors work to increase the numbers of monarch butterflies who have been severely threatened as a species in recent years. Monarchs have a 9% survival rate when left in the wild, but if you bring them into a protective environment from when the eggs hatch to their metamorphosis into butterflies you give them about a 75% survival rate. You can imagine if an initiative to protect monarchs is shared across our nation the difference it could make.



I will write out here the whole process and the learning we experienced last summer. We began by inviting a local retired school teacher that had been raising monarchs for over 40 years to teach a class for one of our church's Wednesday faith formation sessions. He wore a black t-shirt with an orange monarch on it with the words "Monarch Whisperer." We were blessed by his presence. Knowing at the time I did have an intention to write about this project to share with others. I explained that I wanted to his information to inspire other churches across the country. He replied, "This is what we want to see happen." This is about putting the seed in the good soil.

I would go on to find large patches of the wild common milkweeds on which monarchs lay their eggs. I collected the caterpillars on milkweed leaves by plucking off the leaf from the plant and then putting them into mason jars with a mesh lid. I collected 40 caterpillars, and we ended up releasing 33.

If this inspires you, watch some YouTube videos on the process and invite in a local expert who has the experience to teach others. Some tips that we learned at our church are these:

Make sure the caterpillars are feed with the milkweed leaves. They can go through a whole milkweed leaf in a day or two.

Place a twig where you are keeping them so that they have an area to attach themselves when they decide to build their cocoon.

To keep the caterpillars enclosed, we found that one can purchase large mesh encasements online.

The wings are wet when they hatch, so you want to give them about a day to get used to their wings before you release them.

Something else I learned in doing this project is that the congregation really got into it. On one Sunday, when we had five hatch the day before, we released them during the children's message and the whole congregation went outside to watch them fly off. Also, individual members of the congregation got inspired to plant milkweeds and raise monarchs in their homes. The last thing which we learned is that the monarchs themselves will give you some love when releasing them. Sometimes you need to offer a finger or a hand for them to get out of their protective environment, and they may sit on your hand for a while before taking off. You will feel an exchange of energy with you as they take flight.

Raising Monarchs-continued

By Rev. Mitch Nelson



Your church may already have pollinator gardens. This has been an important development for many churches. There is a two part reason why turf grass lawns are harmful for the environment. First, they remove an area where there could be native plants. Second, the chemicals that are used to take care of these grass areas are harmful to pollinator species.

There is a need for the Monarch migration route to have native plants for food along their way to Mexico. By having a pollinator garden with milkweeds, one will help ultimately help raise little angels. Let me explain: Monarchs take a little over a couple of months to migrate to central Mexico, and when they arrive, it is around the Day of the Dead and All Saints' Day. In this mountain region of Mexico, the churches ring their bells in celebration of saints and angels returning from their journey. May your congregation experience the joy of making it possible for monarchs to fly home like angels.

[Send me an email](#) to let me know if your church raises monarchs. I want to track our collective efforts and their impact.

The Rev. Mitch Nelson is the Pastor of [United Protestant Church UCC](#) in Duluth, Minnesota.



Our Vision

To continue our three-hundred year tradition of spiritual presence and service to the community

To live and grow in the spirit of Jesus Christ

To share our time, talents and resources in support of community and other missions, through which Jesus Christ might be made known to others

To welcome into the Groton Congregational Church family all those who share our love of Jesus Christ and our mission of community service.

To continue a tradition of caring, comfort and support for all those within the Groton Congregational Church family.



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Bring Your Family to Our Family. We are Here to Celebrate Jesus Christ with You.

Located near historic Fort Griswold, by the banks of the Thames River, Groton Congregational Church, an Open & Affirming Church, welcomes you with open hearts, minds, and arms. We offer a warm and progressive environment for worshippers from all walks of life. Our motto is; *No matter who you are or where you are Life's Journey you are always welcome here.*

If you want to know the love of God and the wonderful plans God has in store for you, come and celebrate the love of Jesus with us through the spoken word and the joy of music.

Sunday Worship begins at 10am.
Stay for After Worship Coffee Hour

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