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First Church of Rowley

...A voice of hope serving the community

February

STEEPLE NOTES

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Pastor's Corner

WHAT GROWS IN WINTER? PEOPLE OF FAITH!

BY THE REV. JEFF MACDONALD, DESIGNATED PASTOR



What's the winter equivalent of the dog days of summer? Whatever they're called, they've arrived! But that doesn't mean we're getting stuck in the snow (at least I hope not). We're coming together, both in-person and online, for spiritual growth – even if you're hibernating!

Lent begins soon on Ash Wednesday, Feb. 18. We have several group activities in the works to help make it a season of encouragement and transformation.

Life Group. Our next Life Group will be on Mondays March 9, 16 and 23. We'll have the same format: Hybrid in the Corinthian Room and on Zoom. We start at 6:30 and end at 7:45. Our theme will be: what we do to grow our spirituality. This will give us room to discuss, for instance, how we as individuals tap our spiritual traditions and move such practices forward in modern times. Newcomers are always welcome.

The Chosen: Viewing & Discussing. Join us, starting in late February, to watch and discuss Season One of "The Chosen." This is a popular show that portrays Jesus' life and impact. We'll meet for about 90 minutes once a week during Lent, finishing in early April. Angie Estevez and Eric Fila will lead this group. Why not check it out and bring friends from the wider community? Dates and times are TBD. Stay tuned for more info.

Getting to Know Us. Perhaps gathering weekly for inspiration and devotion sounds good right about now. Join us in person Wednesdays from 10:00 to Noon. Leaders are Nicola Pyburn and Judy Robillard. If interested, please speak to one of them to confirm the exact meeting times for the date you'll be there.

Bible Study. Would you like meet up weekly for 30 or 45 minutes to explore God's word with me & a small group? I'd like to lead a study of Ephesians, a short book that explores the substance of Christian life. We could begin in Lent or wait until after Easter. To plan it, I need to know who's interested. Please shoot me a note at firstchurchrowleypastor44@gmail.com or tap me on the shoulder if you're interested!

I hope you'll try at least one of these small groups. It's in such settings that bonds are forged and spiritual connections are made.

Blessings & see you soon,
Rev. Jeff

CHALLENGING OURSELVES WITH A REGULAR LENTEN PRACTICE

The holy season of Lent is about to begin with Ash Wednesday, Feb. 18. Lent marks 40 days of spiritual preparation for Easter. It's something we can do individually and together. Here I'll speak to the individual part. (For the "together" part, see my other column in this issue).

Lent gets very little attention in our consumeristic society. No one sends Lent cards or hosts Lent parties. There's very little to commodify and not much material profit to be gained in a religious season that emphasizes fasting, prayer, humility, mercy and charity.

But there's much to be gained spiritually by shifting our daily practices for 40 days, tempering our impulses and presenting ourselves repeatedly to God. Then listening. Hearing. Reflecting. Pivoting. Letting our hearts and minds be transformed over 40 days.

Perhaps you'll embrace a personal practice, such as The Daniel Fast. I've done this one myself a few times. It involves doing Lent (Feb. 18 – April 3) without animal foods or sweets. For beverage, you drink water. If you're a big meat eater or milk drinker, it can be challenging to forsake the likes of burgers and dairy for six weeks. But it's very doable, and self-discipline through challenge is the point. As added benefits, you're apt to feel better and lose weight. If this interests you, I suggest looking at The Daniel Fast by Susan Gregory and/or her website: www.daniel-fast.com. She explains how the fast includes diet and prayer, a powerful combination with ancient roots for Christians and Jews.

Or if prayer is your speed, try praying the Psalms in Lent. Psalms are divinely inspired prayers, collected for us to read and speak in the Bible's Book of Psalms. Just open your Bible and pray four Psalms aloud each day, starting Feb. 18. Do it at set times, for instance: one Psalm when you get up, the next ones at noon, dusk and before bed. By Easter, you will have prayed all 150 Psalms. Notice as you go: what did I just say in that psalm? Why does God enjoy hearing that from me? What themes do I keep hearing? What do they tell me about God's values?

Whatever you decide to practice daily or weekly in Lent, I pray it will bring you into a closer bond with the living God.

Blessings and see you soon,
Rev. Jeff

THE MISSIONS COMMITTEE

We were thankful this year to have the addition of Lisa Jesionowski.

In September we resumed The Community Cafe which has been frequented by a loyal group of parishioners as well as a few off and on from the community. In October we changed the event to the last Tuesday of the month from 9- 10:30.

We have put out requests to continue to fill The Food Pantry box and have seen a slow but steady increase in its contents. As planned and as requested the Boy Scouts are delivering it to the pantry.

During the month of December we again enjoyed the Holiday Giving Tree. With the help of many generous folks we collected gifts and gift cards for several Pine Grove School children as well as Market Basket gift cards for the Food pantry.

We will continue to collect hats, gloves and mittens on the sanctuary wreaths through the middle of January and then deliver to Emmaus House in Haverhill.

Through the thoughtful spirit and generous ideas brought forth by Angie Estevez Missions is now in collaboration with the Community Conversations Death Cafe, which meets the last Sunday of each month. We also had the pleasure of being a part of the very special and well attended Blue Christmas gathering, which took place on December 21.

As two of us are on the Governance Task Force we look forward to positive changes that will occur in this new year.

Pam Sanford
Ellen Barrett
Lisa Jesionowski

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

- 2/2 Amy Hanson
- 2/2 Gidget Roberts
- 2/9 Ellen Barrett
- 2/11 Alexandra Floodman
- 2/13 Patti Cummings
- 2/14 Hannah Conrad
- 2/14 James Somers, III
- 2/21 Ken Sanford
- 2/22 Nancy Hill

Many Hands make light work

After Church Fellowship Assignments

January – Compassionate Care Network
February – Thrift Shop
March - Diaconate
April – Missions
May – Music Committee and Inspirational Singers
June – Finance/Trustees
July – Thrift Shop
August - None
September – Missions
October – Finance/Trustees
November - Diaconate
December – Music Committee and Inspirational Singers.

Steeple Notes Entry Schedule

January -Compassionate Care Network
February - Missions
March - Deacons (including Christian Ed.)
April - Finance/Trustees
May - Music Committee
June - The Thrift Shop
July - Pastoral Relations Committee
August - Getting to Know Us
September - Golf Tournament & Flower Committee
October - Old Tyme Country Fair
November - Community Dinner Team
December - Pancake Breakfast Team

Welcoming additional entries as needed!





EVENTS AT A GLANCE

WEDS

Getting to Know Us
10:00 am - 12:00 pm

SAT 14TH

Pancake Breakfast
8:00 am - 9:30 am

SUN 22ND

Death Cafe
5:00 pm - 6:30 pm

TUE 24TH

Community Cafe
9:00 am - 10:30 am

TBD

“The Chosen” viewing and discussion
more details to come



GETTING TO KNOW US

MEETING
WEDNESDAY MORNINGS
10:00 AM - 12:00 PM
CORINTHIAN ROOM

PANCAKE BREAKFAST

FEBRUARY 14TH - VALENTINE'S DAY

8:00AM - 9:30 AM



175 Main Street Rowley MA 01969

ROWLEY'S

DEATH

CAFE



COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

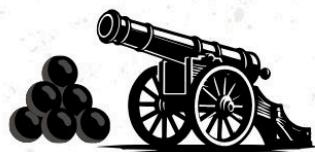
*Death, Grief, Living & Loving
Cake too!*

Location:

First Congregational Church of Rowley
175 Main Street, Rowley, MA

**NOV 30, DEC 28, JAN 25, FEB 22
LAST SUNDAY OF EVERY MONTH
5-6:30PM**

Info: Angie@I'llStandByYou.Net
FB& IG: @CommConvosDeathCafe



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF ROWLEY

COMMUNITY CAFE



Tuesday February 24th

9:00 - 10:30 AM

free to all

175 MAIN STREET
ROWLEY MA 01969



VIEWING AND DISCUSSING “THE CHOSEN” SEASON ONE

During Lent, many people choose to pray more, reflect more deeply, or set aside intentional time to grow closer to God.

This year, we’re inviting you to do that with us by watching Season One of The Chosen together, beginning the week of Ash Wednesday.

Whether you’re new to the series or have watched before, The Chosen offers a meaningful way to walk through Lent - focusing on Jesus, His ministry, and the people whose lives were changed by encountering Him.

More details coming soon. We’d love to have you join us for this Lenten journey.

