

The Meeting House Times

The Congregational Church of Salisbury, United Church of Christ

February 2013

Services: Sundays at 10:00 a.m.

Worship & Communion, 1st Sunday of the month at 10:00 a.m



Pamela Wyeth, Editor



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No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here!

CHRISTIAN ACTION IN ACTION

And they will know we are Christians by our Love!



HOLLY TIERNEY
Our Ambassador in India

When the Board of Christian Action decided to focus its global outreach efforts in partnership with people we have a relationship with, Holly, a member of our church, instantly came to mind. Her important work, her own

outreach, became a perfect opportunity for Christian Action to become engaged with one of our own and share the journey with her. When she spoke to the congregation about her work and studies in Mysore, India, about her goal to earn a degree in social work, and her hopes of ultimately establishing a clinic in Mysore, we knew we had found a good match.

With her professors, Holly chose a school for the deaf with a residence for boys. Holly paid the school several visits, and developed an art program designed to help the children develop their other learning modalities. The school, Sai Ranga Vidya Samsthe, had challenges with cleanliness in the sleeping quarters. With the first donation from Christian Action, Holly purchased new blankets for the children. As there were as many as five children sharing one drinking cup, she also made sure every child had his own cup. Holly also purchased art supplies and implemented her art program. She worked with the principal to identify which children had hearing impairment that could be improved with a hearing aid device.

In October Holly was transferred to another project for her upcoming semester. While she still visits the students at Sai Ranga Vidya Samsthe, she is now focusing on a school for children with cerebral palsy. She has been given permission to start a study on the social causes of cerebral palsy. With the funds she has remaining from her second donation from Christian Action she will focus on the students at the new school and develop a learning program based on their needs.

What an amazing young woman!

Mindy Fitting

INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIAN ACTION

The Board of Christian Action has an important job within and on behalf of the church. The by-laws state "It shall encourage the Church's knowledge of and participation in 'Our Christian World Mission,' and shall promote a serving fellowship and seek and support Christian solutions of human and social problems. It may seek financial support for specific projects....."

We are a board of nine individuals, and each of us has his/her own special calling. Some encourage a direct pipeline to the needs of those in our communities; some have a special leaning towards solving social injustice and domestic violence; some of us carry the vision of a world free of hunger, poverty, and disease. Together we represent the members of the Salisbury Congregational Church.

Our funds come from within the church. Our church budget designates \$10,000 for Christian Action; the rest comes from the Fall Festival. The funds are then used in a number of ways, many of which you can read about in this issue of the *Meeting House Times*.

And they will know we are Christians by our love!
Mindy Fitting, Chair

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*Giving frees us
from the familiar
territory of our
own needs by
opening our
mind to the
unexplained
worlds occupied
by the needs of
others.
Barbara Bush*



Growing in Faith Together



CELEBRATING CHRISTIAN ACTION

"Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves." James 1:22

We have declared February as the month that we celebrate *Christian Action*, all the ways that we live out our faith. The Board of Christian Action is charged with representing the congregation to the world at large. It is their responsibility to determine the most effective ways to spread God's love beyond the doors of our church. We empower this committee to represent each one of us in meeting the needs of our brothers and sisters, both locally and globally.

I am hopeful that this issue of the MHT will inspire you to discern what God might be calling you to do. Please take some time this month to reflect on what you would like to do this year to support the work of our church. The life of our church is dependent on the volunteer efforts of each and every member. We need you.

The nominating committee will be meeting this month to develop a roster of committee members for the Annual Meeting in April. I have asked them to contact every member of the church to ask how you would like to use your gifts and talents to support the church. Please take some time to think about this and let the committee know what you decide.

Lent begins this month (Feb. 13th), which makes this a perfect time of year to make a commitment to be a *doer*. I would invite you to start by choosing one action as your Lenten promise. Take the 40 days of Lent and practice being a *doer* each day. For example, you might choose to say or do one particularly kind thing each day. This might just be thanking the cashier at the grocery store, or saying the words, "I love you" once a day. You could decide to volunteer at the Food Pantry once a week, read to a child, visit an elderly person, shovel someone's sidewalk when it snows.

Lent is also a great time to develop a spiritual discipline. I will be sending you a daily devotion (via email) each day. Allow a bit of time to read and reflect, to be still and listen for the voice of God in your life. Use the chilly month of February to curl up in front of the fire and read some of the great spiritual writers – a wonderful way to warm your body and soul!

The Board of Christian Action works hard to change the lives of our neighbors in need. Lent is the period of time when you commit to changing your own life. Make some decisions today that will empower you to experience the glorious transformation of the season. When Easter comes (March 31st) why not be prepared to shout "Halleluiahs" from the mountaintop?

Wishing you peace on the journey,

Pastor Diane

Email: pastor.diane@salisburycongregational.org

LENT PROGRAMMING: SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

Wednesday, February 13th, begins our 40-day journey of Lent. Lent is the time when Christians focus on improvement of spiritual life and strengthening of relationship with God. Here are some of the offerings for Lent:

- **Forgiveness Workshops:** On two Wednesday evenings, **February 20th** and **March 6th, from 6:00 - 7:15 p.m.** Reverend Eileen Epperson will lead workshops on Forgiveness. Rev. Epperson is a Spiritual Coach and founder of "The Forgiveness Project." Please see the article reprinted from her newsletter on page 9. Lent is a perfect time to let go of past resentments that you may be harboring. Free yourself of anger and hurt – live out the resurrection story.
- Begin reading *Help, Thanks, Wow* by Ann Lamont to prepare for a book discussion next month on the importance of prayer in our lives.
- Sign up for a daily devotion to be sent to your email box each day during Lent. There are a number available to you (ucc.org; henrinouwen.org; reminder@d365.org; renaissanceunity.org). In addition Pastor Diane will be sending a daily thought out to the congregation, via email. (Make sure the office has your current email address). This is a great opportunity to start a daily prayer discipline – just a few moments – but it makes a big difference!
- Come to church! Participating in worship is an integral part of the Lenten journey. Make a commitment to come each week and bring your family.

"COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS"

Salisbury Sampler, January/February

"Community Conversations," a series of educational presentations and discussions scheduled throughout the year that focus on important topics, continues in February. The first in this series (held in January), "End-of-Life: Dialogues and Decisions," is divided into three sessions and relates to a topic many find difficult to tackle. It includes a viewing of "Consider the Conversation," an award-winning documentary, comprised of interviews with patients, family members, doctors, nurses, social workers, clergy, and national end-of-life experts who provide perspectives on what it means to die in 21st century America.

Not surprisingly, what they learned was that people find it extremely hard to communicate about and prepare for the end of their life.

The series also includes guidance from the "Conversation Project," a program dedicated to helping people talk about their wishes for end-of-life care and to supporting families with making these often difficult conversations easier. The sessions will be facilitated by representatives from each of the sponsoring organizations. They will meet on **Sunday, February 10th, and February 24th from 3:00 to 5:00 at the Scoville Memorial Library.**

REACHING OUT BEYOND HURRICANE SANDY

Our church has been given a very exciting challenge! Reverend Sara Smith, the minister of the United Congregational Church of Bridgeport, has reached out for our help in aiding hurricane victims in that hard-hit city. When we announced the need for non-perishable food and warm clothing to be taken to Bridgeport, our congregation responded with overwhelming generosity. In fact, even non-church members in our community also were leaving items in our vestibule to be delivered.

Cynthia LaPier and Janet Kaufman made the first trips to Bridgeport in November. Peg and Dave Heck made the December deliveries. Diane and other members of our church went to Bridgeport before Thanksgiving to help them prepare their community Thanksgiving dinner.

The Bridgeport church hosts a weekly community supper called "Feel The Warmth." We will be hosting one of these dinners in Bridgeport in February. It will involve shopping, cooking and serving a meal for over 500 people!

I am especially excited about this outreach project. The staff at UCC Bridgeport are so welcoming and appreciative of our help. We really are making a difference! We have decided to partner with this church and continue to help them in the future beyond the hurricane relief effort.

Reaching out to these people in need has been such a rewarding experience. Whether it is with our mission trip to Mexico or in our own home state, we have been welcomed with open arms. We are so pleased to be continuing our relationship with this very special church that is doing so much good in the local community.

Peggy Heck

Our local outreach includes support for

EXTRAS

SOAR

Housatonic Child Care Center

Chore Services

Salisbury Visiting Nurses

Operation Fuel

Housatonic Youth Services Bureau

Silver Lake Conference Center

Our global outreach includes support for

Neighbors in Need

One Great Hour of Sharing

REMEMBER OWL'S KITCHEN

Please remember those in our communities in need of the basics. Non-perishable food is always welcome, and can be left in the baskets in the narthex.



FROM THE DEACONS THE DEACONS' DISCRETIONARY FUND

Of all the marvelous things that are beloved church does, nothing is more *Christian* than The Deacons' Discretionary Fund. The monies in this account are a line item in our annual budget and are dispersed by Pastor Diane with the advice of the former head deacons.

This fund is used to support the needs of our community, which simply put means that if you are hungry we will help to feed you; if you are cold we will help to keep you warm; if there is a home repair that is crucial and beyond your means, we will help defer the cost; if you are unwell and need help with medical expenses, we will help you to pay your bills. We will also help you to utilize other non-profits in the area for their support, making sure that we are not the only means of aid and that you are aware that there are various organizations that can also be helpful.

This fund also serves as a conduit to help gather financial support for exceptional cases such as the Theresa Carroll Fund and fund raiser that was able to rally support for one of our much cherished members to help with the expenses associated with her illness.

There are occasions when Pastor Diane gives food vouchers to people outside of our church family when she knows we're a last resort for them. And as we call ourselves Christians, it is with great love and compassion that we help to feed those who have less than we do.

This fund allows us to put our faith into action. It is, in fact, FAITH IN ACTION.

"They will know we are Christians by our love,
by our love. They will know we are
Christians by our love." *Carol Magowan*

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN UPDATE

As of January 14, 2013, pledges totaled \$704,449 with cash already received of \$531,017. As a result of this wonderful response on the part of the congregation, we have started the renovations of the parish hall.

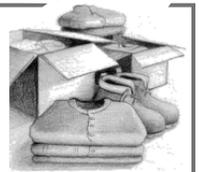
With a new kitchen, an upgraded conference room, a handicapped-accessible bathroom, and a redecorated fellowship hall, we can look forward to significantly increasing our outreach to the community.

In addition, we will be rewiring the organ console this summer, and repairing a set of organ pipes. This work should be completed this summer in time for **Al's 90th birthday!**

We are still accepting donations toward the Capital Campaign. If you have any questions, please contact Ted Sands.

*Clothes for
those in need*

The UCC of Bridgeport continues to welcome winter clothes for people who live in the area and who participate in the outreach programs at UCC Bridgeport. Clothes can be left in the boxes in the narthex.



The Board of Christian Action has sponsored the Global Crafts Boutique for many years. This year the event opened during the Salisbury Fall Festival, continued on Sundays after church, and ended with the Hometown Holidays. Prior to the event, committee members spend several days opening boxes, unwrapping items, and creating attractive displays. We admire the beautiful designs and bright colors of the scarves and jewelry. We arrange the woven baskets made of natural fibers and dyes. We examine the wood and stone carvings. We hang up the lovely Christmas ornaments and children's toys.

We are grateful that so many people in our community purchase these hand-crafted items from around the world.

Most know that the items are "fair traded" but how many know that the sponsoring organizations do far more than just buying and selling items from less-developed countries?

- ✦ Provide cash advances so artisans don't have to take out high-interest loans
- ✦ Suggest new designs and products that will appeal to the U.S. market
- ✦ Teach new skills so artisans can develop their craft
- ✦ Encourage artisans to use natural and recycled materials and environmentally-friendly processes
- ✦ Provide grants so artisans can expand their resources
- ✦ Develop longer-term commitments so artisans can plan for the future

- ✦ Assist new artisans with their costing and business strategies
- ✦ Support equal rights for women
- ✦ Pay a fair wage based on cost of materials plus production time and skill level

For a number of years we have received merchandise from Ten Thousand Villages and SERRV. This year we added the Center for Amazon Community Ecology and Nondyebo Linens.

So next year we hope you will encourage your neighbors and friends to support our Global Crafts sales. Our purchases have an impact on individual artisans, their families, and their communities. We can help improve the lives of others!

Jeanette Weber

SERRV INTERNATIONAL LOAN FUND

Fair Trade can be defined as: *a movement whose goal is to help producers in developing countries get a fair price for their products so as to reduce poverty, provide for the ethical treatment of workers and farmers, and promote environmentally sustainable practices.*

Given that, our craft sale is not a fundraiser but is rather part of our mission.

We have sold over \$100,000 of Fair Trade goods since our first sale over 25 years ago, thereby benefitting countless artisans.

We also support Fair Trade by investing in the **SERRV International Loan Fund**. The Loan Fund receives small investments from individuals and organizations and uses the funds to support the artisans. For example, they make interest-free micro-loans to artisans to buy raw materials or to live on until an order is fulfilled, and they fund special project loans to select producer groups for capital investment. Our \$1,000 investment is currently earning interest at the rate of 2.5%, supporting SERRV while providing us additional income for the work of the Board of Christian Action. Many thanks to the congregation for supporting Fair Trade by supporting our sale! For more information on the SERRV International Loan Fund, please visit their website at <http://bit.ly/10FB0kD>.

Jennifer Weigel

WALKING TO END POVERTY - CROP

This past September, our church participated in the 30th annual CROP Hunger Walk. Sponsored by Church World Service and organized at our church by the Board of Christian Action, this event offers us a whole host of opportunities to "walk the walk" and help others.

CROP stands for Community Response to Overcome Poverty. Walkers from churches and schools all over the area raise funds by gathering donations from sponsors. Walkers choose 5 or 10 mile distances on a scenic route, or to walk any distance great or small on the track at Housatonic Valley Regional High School.

Seventy-five percent of the funds raised go to help impoverished people around the world providing food and water, as well as other resources, like education, that empower people to meet their own needs.

The remaining 25% of the funds raised are sent each year to the Northwest

Connecticut Food Bank. The food bank provides food vouchers and gift certificates to area grocery stores for those in need.

The annual CROP Walk offers opportunities for all to help: event organization, publicity, helping serve refreshments at check points on the walk route, walking, sponsoring, and cheering!

Helping organize our participation in CROP this year was just one of many positive experiences I've had serving on the Board of Christian Action. As the name implies, we put our faith into action out in the world near and far. It is a great feeling to serve others in these concrete ways. Having always been a *hands-on* person who learns by doing, I can feel my understanding of what it means to be a Christian growing with each project we take on.

Cynthia Eustice LaPier

REFLECTION

What draws me to be a part of Christian Action? I had participated in mission opportunities through other churches, so when I was asked to consider joining Christian Action it was an easy commitment to make. There is a deep-down wonderful feeling of peace, joy, satisfaction, and real happiness that I feel when I see pictures of people whose lives have been touched in a positive way through the work we do. To be a member of the Board of Christian Action is a privilege. We work as ambassadors of the Salisbury Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, spreading God's love throughout the world.

Mindy Fitting

THE GIVING TREE



One of the many ways our church reaches out locally is through our Christmas Giving Tree. Every year during Advent, the Board of Christian Action sets up a Christmas tree in the Parish Hall and decorates it with paper ornaments.

Written on each ornament is a wish from a needy child or parent served by Astor Early Childhood Programs in Millerton, NY or The Grace Smith House – a shelter for abused women and their children.

This year over 140 beautifully wrapped presents were placed under the tree by our generous congregation and delivered to their very grateful recipients. Requests for everything from gift cards to kitchen supplies to clothing for a newborn to a toddler bed to a bicycle with helmet and safety pads were met. Following is a letter we received from Kim, Sharvon and Stephanie, educators and advocates at Astor:

"Happy New Year to All.

Holidays can be so stressful for many and all of us here at Astor Early Childhood Program in Millerton would like you to know how your kindness and generosity relieves that stress for so many.

Some of our families that you have helped are struggling with unemployment, which of course brings with it financial difficulties from rental, utilities, grocery and gas issues.

Your gifts of so many useful and thoughtful gifts are valued by so many. Warm blankets, gas and CVS cards, towels and many other items go far to care for families in so many ways.

The families have many reactions to such generosity. Some are quiet and shy, some are tearful and there are those who react with a childlike awe. No matter the reaction please know that they all are so very thankful for all you do. The family services staff here are also so thankful. To deliver the gifts you have donated and to witness the families' gratitude and joy is an honor for us all.

So again, Happy New Year and please accept our warmest and sincere thank you and love."

This letter and others from Astor's children are posted on our Christian Action bulletin board in the Parish Hall.

We have lived in northwest Connecticut for forty years. In that time, Mark and I have raised a family and watched our children grow up, delighting in the opportunities this area provides and reveling in the beauty of God's creation. My family and I have been truly blessed and I feel that serving on the Board of Christian Action provides me an opportunity to extend a helping hand to those who are less fortunate. I've had the joy of working with so many thoughtful and kind people and will never cease to be amazed at the compassion and generosity of the members of our congregation!

Jane Capecelatro

SOLES4SOULS – THE STORY OF SHOES

When Mama Lynn Elliot visited our congregation, I was deeply drawn to her story of finding herself re-turning to Tanzania in Africa after a visit, and going on to create her village *Light in Africa* for the orphaned children there.

When I asked her what the needs of her village were, one thing she named really stuck with me. She needed shoes for her children so they could attend school, all 286 children.

I kept thinking about those shoes; it seemed like something that could be done, but I had no idea how to go about getting them.

But it seems that if you really concentrate on something long enough, and pray from your inner heart, the Holy Spirit always responds. And so it was last September, when I prayed "God, move me in the direction you want me to go. I promise to be listening, to have my awareness raised to you, and to be willing to move when you move me."

Three days later I was assigned to go to a trade show in Springfield, Mass. and sit in on the presentations. When the keynote speaker was introduced I was amazed, yet again, at how mysteriously God works! The speaker was Wayne Elsey, founder and past CEO of Soles4Souls, a not-for-profit organization he created in response to the tsunami in Indonesia. That first distribution of more than 250,000 shoes was soon followed by another to the victims of Hurricane Katrina. I couldn't wait for the break that day, because I was pretty sure I had found a way to get shoes to Mama Lynn's children.

Wayne Elsey listened to me that day with an open heart. Four hours later I received an email from him that he had copied to his top organizers at Soles4Souls. By the next day a plan began to take shape to ship the shoes to a port in East Tanzania where Soles4Souls has a relationship with the customs officials. By the following week, Soles4Souls confirmed they had 300 pairs of black school shoes, and also school uniforms for the children.

At this time, Mama Lynn and her volunteers are trying to get the necessary transportation in place to get the shoes from the port in Dars Es Salaam, to the *Light in Africa* village. No small feat, as it turns out, as the village is 500 miles one way (or ten hours) from the port, and she has limited options and resources. The title of Wayne's recent book 'Almost Isn't Good Enough' keeps running through my head. But I know God will show a way, probably in the least expected, and these shoes and uniforms will get to Mama Lynn's children.

Mindy Fitting



This Christmas I took an ornament from the "Giving Tree" and read: "A mother needs pots and pans."

There was no doubt in my mind that this request came from a resident of the Grace Smith House, a woman who got up the courage to leave an abusive living situation. Grace Smith House in Millerton would be a temporary stop as she sought a new home.

As I purchased the pots and pans I visualized this mom unpacking them in her new apartment. We are a part of her new beginning. It gave me a deeply satisfying feeling – the spirit of Christmas. Just one of so many opportunities we have to spread the Love of our Christ Redeemer. As St. Francis said, "It is in giving that we receive."

Peace, Dick Taber



The Board of Christian Action was honored to be called "the Heart" of the work of our church.

Pastor Diane talked of the many parts of the body of the church. The "head," for instance, keeps track of the finances to ensure the health of the church. The "heart" feels and expresses our Christian love for the members of the church, the community around us, and people around the world. We would like to have "Know We Are Christians By Our Love" as a motto by which we are known.

Members of Christian Action will be serving at coffee hours in February wearing badges designed by Jano Fairservis.

We would be happy to have Valentine hearts and sentiments last all year long for everyone.

Jano Fairservis

CHRISTIAN ACTION BY CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Each Sunday, the children are invited to bring an offering of money or a food item to Sunday School. This year the Sunday School purchased puzzles, games, coloring books and crayons which traveled to Mexico with our Simply Smiles mission group. These gifts were greatly appreciated and there are many photographs of the Mexican children (and grown-ups!) enjoying them. The Sunday School also sent huge boxes of diapers to the Bridgeport Church after Hurricane Sandy. Countless cans and other needed items for OWL's Kitchen have been brought in throughout the year.

Several families have found opportunities to work as a unit to help a neighbor, friend, or stranger. Families have suggested that, instead of birthday presents, food items for OWL's Kitchen or donations for non-profit organizations such as the Youth Services Bureau be contributed; some have stepped in to babysit or cook a meal for another family in need; some walked together in the CROP Walk; some volunteered at the Habitat for Humanity tag sale; some served at the Fellowship Hour after church. Working together toward a common goal feels good, does good, and sets a life-long pattern of thinking of others.

Barbara Collins

SUPER SOUPER BOWL SUNDAY



**SOUPER
BOWL**

At the time of this writing, the final contenders for this year's Super Bowl are still unknown. Will it be the Patriots or the Baltimore Ravens against the 49ers or the Atlanta Falcons? Only time will tell. What we DO know, however, is that on Super Bowl Sunday, February 3rd, we will have SOUPER BOWL Sunday at church. On that day, everyone is invited to bring cans of soup or monetary offerings which will be donated to OWL's Kitchen. Will it be chicken noodle or tomato against cream of broccoli or pumpkin bisque? Only time will tell.

SILVER LAKE OPENS REGISTRATION FOR SUMMER 2013 CONFERENCES

Silver Lake Online Registration
by Eric Anderson



SHARON (01/15/2013) -- Silver Lake Conference Center opened online registration for the summer 2013 camping season today. As 5:00 drew near on the first day, new registrations were creeping right up to the 100 mark, already a tenth of the way to last year's enrollment.

The thirty-eight conference options this year appeal to a wide range of ages. "Mom and Me" gives 4th graders the chance to experience Silver Lake for the first time along with their own mother. "Moms" and "Mes" get to make friends, laugh and play, swim and sing both together and separately over the course of half a week. At the other end of the age range, high school students (including those graduating in 2013) can spend a week in Orland, Maine, where the "Hammer and a Nail" conference does hands-on work from carpentry to cooking for the H.O.M.E. Co-op.

For those looking for an active week, "Fun in the Sun" is filled with "playing, passing, shooting, and scoring." "Exploring God's Creation" will scale mountains, canoe rivers, and climb the trees on Silver Lake's high ropes challenge course. 5th and 6th graders can dive right into "Water World," while in the same week 7th and 8th graders will set feet to pedals for up to 20 miles a day "Biking North."

A number of conferences awaken the creative spirit: "God Song," "Sing Praise," "God Slam," and "God Show" invite their participants to make music, poetry, dance and drama throughout the week. "Rock of Ages," for high school age youth, will bring the pulsing beat of popular music together with "the first big frontman, Jesus," for an unforgettable week of sound, light, and faith.

Literary themed conferences include "Christmas at Hogwarts," combining the Christian ideas of hope, peace, joy, and love with the magical world of Harry Potter; "The Feeding Games," which contrasts the Christian commitment to making a difference with the dystopian world of the popular novel and movie; and Amazing gRace, which turns the TV reality show into an exploration of how Christians of all nations practice their faith.

In addition to the programs for young people in grades 4 through 12, Silver Lake offers Family Camp experiences as well during the week of August 11th.

To learn more, visit silverlakeect.org. To register, visit silverlakeect.org/register.

TACONIC LEARNING CENTER CLASSES

Duane Estes will be leading a class this session on Interfaith Understanding. The course is based on the book, *Getting At The Heart of Interfaith*.

Eight classes will be held at Noble Horizons on Mondays from 2:00 - 4:00 p.m. from January 21st - March 4th.

Declaration

We declare that children have the right to live free of the threat of gun violence, accidental or intentional.

We recognize the right and responsibility as a civilized society to take measures to protect children and ensure their right to grow in safety.

We hereby declare our homes, our churches and our communities to be Sanctuaries of Peace. We pledge to work together to create safe, firearm-free sanctuaries for our children, community, families and neighbors. We further urge our congregants, neighbors, and all people of faith and good reason to take clear steps to remove deadly assault weapons from their homes.

We pledge to work within our communities to help build a culture of peace that includes teaching young people alternatives to violence. We will actively reach out to those people marginalized by mental illness.

As we honor the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr., we too refuse to believe that "the bank of justice is bankrupt", and we refuse to accept that we must sacrifice our sacred responsibility for our children's well-being on the altar of personal right of possession of deadly weapons.

In Peace,

Rev. Diane Monti-Catania, Salisbury
Rev. Melinda Keck, Kent
Rev. Micki Nunn-Miller, Cornwall
Anne and Tim Hughes, Silver Lake Conference Center, Sharon
Rev. Michael Wu, Winsted
Rev. Jacquelyn Hall, Winchester Center
Rev. Donald Morgan, Warren
Rev. Erick Olsen, Norfolk
Rev. Savage Frieze, North Canaan
Rev. Margret Hofmeister, New Hartford
Rev. Dick Taber, Salisbury

We endeavor to end the long night of fear that our children and families have had to endure. We have witnessed too many shameful slaughters of innocents, for too long. King's words remind us "Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedomby drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred."

We will not be silent anymore. We shall not forget. We must now grant our children the right to freedom from fear of deadly weapons, and we must take action to change the current culture of fear to a culture of peace.

We, United Church of Christ faith leaders of our Northwest CT Corner community endorse this Proclamation of Sanctuaries of Peace, and we resolve to work toward the assurance of the civil right of all to live in freedom from fear of deadly firearm violence.

Scripture tells us, *And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. — Isaiah 2:4*

We are committed to working for peace, in our homes, in our communities and in our world.

February

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
African-American History Month					1 8:00 - Men's Interfaith Bible Study	2 <i>Groundhog Day</i>
3 10:00 - Worship & Communion; No church school; crib/toddler care available. Super Bowl Sunday 11:30 - Board of Trustees <i>Boy Scout Sunday</i>	4 2:00 - 4:00 - Interfaith Understanding Class at Noble Horizons*	5 4:00 - 5:00 - Comfort & Conversation - in the Parish House upstairs meeting room	6 7:30 - Choir Rehearsal	7	8 8:00 - Men's Interfaith Bible Study	9
10 10:00 - Worship & church school 11:30 - Bd. of Christian Action 3:00 - 5:00 - "Community Conversation" at the Scoville Library *	11 2:00 - 4:00 - Interfaith Understanding Class at Noble Horizons*	12 4:00 - 5:00 - Comfort & Conversation - in the Parish House upstairs meeting room	13 7:30 - Choir Rehearsal <i>Ash Wednesday</i>	14 <i>Valentine's Day</i>	15 8:00 - Men's Interfaith Bible Study	16
17 10:00 - Worship & church school 11:15 - Church Council <i>First Sunday in Lent</i>	18 2:00 - 4:00 - Interfaith Understanding Class at Noble Horizons* <i>Presidents' Day (observed)</i>	19 4:00 - 5:00 - Comfort & Conversation - in the Parish House upstairs meeting room	20 6:00 - 7:15 - Forgiveness Workshop 7:30 - Choir Rehearsal	21 <i>Presidents' Day</i>	22 8:00 - Men's Interfaith Bible Study	23
24 10:00 - Worship & church school 3:00 - 5:00 - "Community Conversation" at the Scoville Library * <i>Second Sunday in Lent</i>	25 12:00 - Women's Brown Bag Lunch in the upstairs meeting room 2:00 - 4:00 - Interfaith Understanding Class at Noble Horizons*	26 4:00 - 5:00 - Comfort & Conversation - in the Parish House upstairs meeting room	27 7:30 - Choir Rehearsal	28 5:30 - Deacons meeting	* Article in this MHT	

DEADLINE FOR THE MARCH NEWSLETTER: SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 17TH



Happy FEBRUARY Birthdays

3rd Adam Rashkoff	15th Laura Flores
4th Don Buckley	16th John Merwin
4th Eric Chin	17th Cynthia LaPier
8th James Habacker	18th Ashley Tedder
8th Bruce McEver	19th Jack Anderson
9th Merrick Noyes	19th Mary Arnold
9th Hannah Ohlinger	20th Jack Ritchie
12th Daniel Rashkoff	21st Christina Rogers
13th Ivy Curry	24th Jim Filkins
13th Jonathan Capecelatro	24th Hope Fitting
14th Rod Lankler	25th Ginny Filkins
14th August Olson	26th Stephanie Tierney
	28th Cora Rydingsword

Reflection by Martin B. Copenhaver

"God loves a cheerful giver," says the Apostle Paul. But is there any other kind? In my experience givers are cheerful. I have never known any truly giving person who has not been a person of cheer. Joy is one of the indelible characteristics of the giving person.

I am not referring to the kind of reluctant, sharp-penciled, let-me-figure-out-what-my-share-is kind of giver. Rather, I am thinking of the open-handed, open-hearted givers. They not only spread cheer and share joy, they obviously know cheer and experience joy.

We might wonder which comes first: Do these people know cheer and joy because they are givers, or are they givers because they are people of cheer and joy? The question seems strangely moot, however, for in the lives of such people the two are inextricably intertwined. Joy and giving flow from one another in a sure and blessed way. Think of it as the endless echo of grace.

Among the reasons why givers are cheerful is that, in giving to others, we are acting in accordance with God's intentions for our lives. After all, we are created to be givers, meant to be givers. So when we close in on ourselves in self-concern, we are departing from what God intends for us, and there is no joy in that.

So Paul enjoins us to give, to borrow the words of Jesus, "so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete."

"Forgiving is Your Freedom" (Reprinted, with permission, from "Spiritual Center Coaching: Living Centered Living Connected)

Eileen L. Epperson, M.A., M.Div.

As we say farewell to 2012, there may be people to forgive so that we can get our lives back. It might be good to take ourselves off the wall as well. Why does forgiving have such a bad rap? "It is so hard." "How can I do that, after what they did?" "I have tried, believe me, I have tried." Etcetera. This article aims to illuminate the shadows around the source of the difficulty with forgiving. We're going to jump right in with **three assertions**.

1. We have misidentified "forgiveness." Forgiveness does not:

- Condone or excuse anyone's behavior
- Mean you are apologizing for feeling angry and hurt
- Mean you have to be in contact with the person or group, much less be friends with them
- Make you vulnerable for more hurt
- Mean you are now unprotected
- Mean it is ok; it didn't hurt that much
- Imply that they won and you lost

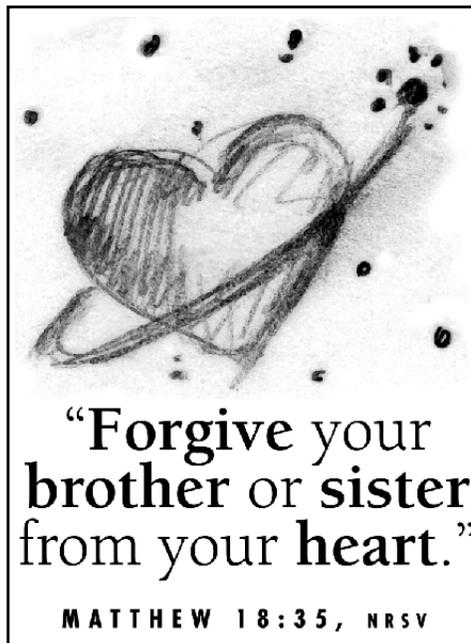
If your understanding of forgiveness includes any of the above, you have probably equated forgiving with giving in and losing out - at least on some level - even though you may believe in your heart of hearts that forgiving is the "right" thing to do, the healthy thing to do. Forgiving can feel as though you are going to diminish or even deny your experience of hurt or anger (which is a kind of self-insult, when you consider it). If you have assumed that forgiving someone implies or means any of the above, forgiving can seem as though you are compromising your integrity. Why would anyone want to do that?

So, if the above bullet points are not connected to forgiving, what are we talking about? The dictionary definitions for the word are: "to give up claim to a debt; to give up resentment; to cease harboring resentment against..." Hmmmm. Harboring resentment sounds active, not passive. Holding resentments close, holding on to them? (To change the metaphor)...throwing logs on the fire of my hurt?

Think for a moment. When you are really

upset, do you think about it once? Twice? Ten times? Like a hamster on a wheel, you probably rehash the event over and over in your mind and/or aloud. You play out the scene in different ways; you give yourself the words you should have said; you are the hero, the conqueror, the defender. And it is all fantasy.

Good news. You are in charge. It may not feel that way, but releasing your hold on the boring but familiar replay of past offenses benefits you, the forgiver, entirely. Releasing resentments does not let the other "off the hook" and it most certainly does not mean you need to renew a relationship or imply that what happened did not have an impact on you at the time. Renewing or reconciling is another step after forgiving, and it is a choice.



2. When we suffer over the past, it is not from what happened or didn't happen, but from the story we keep telling ourselves.

The costs of replaying pain are often unnoticed but they are staggering: fatigue, high blood pressure, depression; distrust, bad sleep, little or no spontaneity or creativity; ill health and ineffectiveness ~

Hanging on to resentments is crippling. Rehearsing resentments is like nailing our foot to the floor and turning in circles; we accomplish little we get dizzy. We may think that our pain is from the incident, but how can it be? The incident is done. It is over. What happened, happened. That part is over.

Forgiving includes letting go of any idea that it could have happened some other

way or that there can be some other past. Ixnay. Not going to happen. So, go through the sadness (it can be surprisingly brief) of accepting the past as it occurred for you. Your suffering (as distinct from sadness or grief) can cease almost on a dime, which can be unsettling if you have been disturbed for years.

3. Only when we have released resentments toward others and regrets toward ourselves can we take effective action.

We are so ineffective when we rehearse our grievances! We have to avoid the person or group. We are stuck and cannot speak or write something we might like to express. After we have freed ourselves and leapt off the hamster wheel we have an opening to stand our ground, make a request, clarify our situation with another.

I know people who have gotten money back they never imagined they could after they stopped wanting to kill the borrower! Somehow, the conversation just went differently and the request for repayment was calm and clear and without blame.

I know people who have connected with people they really wanted back in their lives but had excommunicated (perhaps for good reason at the time). People know when you don't want to execute them and it really helps reconnection. Giving up the determination to punish the evil-doer and opt for self-expression instead is an incredible self-loving act.

To summarize:

- a. Releasing resentments does not condone anything. In fact, forgiving has nothing to do with another person.
- b. Forgiving frees the forgiver who can generate their life, no longer stuck in the past.
- c. Suffering caused by replaying a "grievance story" over and over stops when we declare we are willing to cease harboring resentment. It is a declaration, not a feeling or a thought. More like a vow or a promise.
- d. The possibility of having contact with the one who "offended" opens up as well. Choice to be related is again possible.
- e. Risk begins as we see that there are no blueprints for communication. Self-expression, authenticity and intimacy become available to us as we learn to experiment with speaking and listening and not running away!

Let the games begin!!