



The Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ



Purpose (from the Gospel of Matthew):

To love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength and our neighbor as ourselves

Vision:

United in Christ's love, a just world for all

Mission:

United in Spirit and inspired by God's grace, we welcome all, love all, and seek justice for all

Weekly E-News Easter Edition

April 1, 2021

Message from the Conference

The Power of Holy Week

During the years when I was a pastor, Holy Week was always a crucial time of the year for me. I so looked forward to the service on Maundy Thursday, as we would recreate and remember the Last Supper, and Jesus' journey to the Cross. Then on Good Friday, we would join with other churches to go through the last seven words, a powerful example of our unity in Christ. And then finally, there is Easter morning! I would prepare for this central day in the Christian year so carefully, though of course, those plans did not always quite work out the way I thought they would! I know that each of you reading this have these very special days of the Christian year front and foremost in your minds as we live through them together over the next few days.

On a personal level, I always found it so amazing how I and my church community would go from the depths of despair to the highest levels of joy in the space of a few days. There is no lower point in the whole year than Good Friday, as we are all reminded of the power of evil and death in our world, power that is still so very present in our world today. And there is no higher point in the whole year than Easter, as we are all reminded of the power of resurrection and love in our world, power that is also still so very present in our world today. And this year we share in these holy days against the backdrop of our continuing global pandemic, and racial and societal injustice.

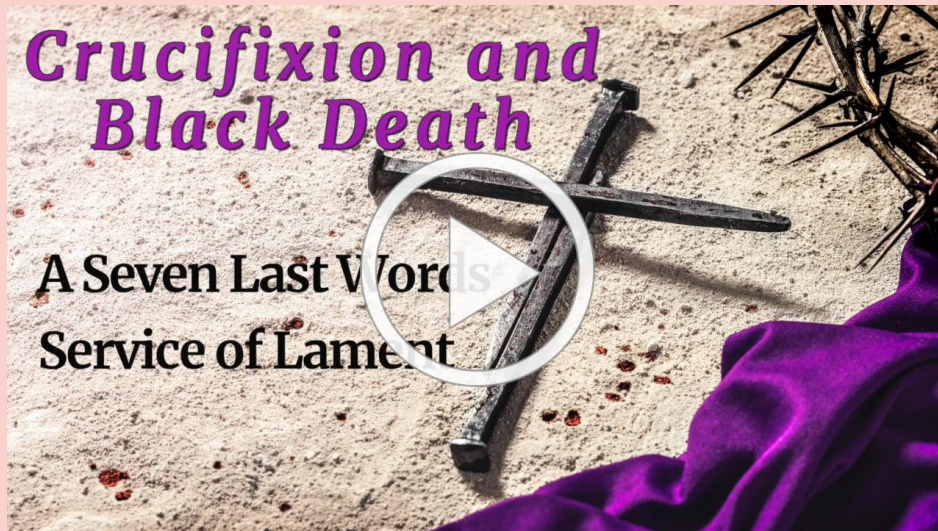
My hope and prayer for you this year is that you will be able to worship too. As key lay leaders and pastors, we get so focused on leading worship that we sometimes don't get to worship ourselves. There are always so many details to try to get right. Yet I pray in some way that you experience the power of Holy Week, that you allow yourself to go down to the depths of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, that you allow yourself to experience the utter joy of Easter day!

May we go through it all together,

Hopefully yours,
Paul

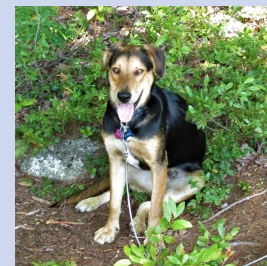
Good Friday: Seven Last Words Service

Created by the Southern New England Conference



GOOD FRIDAY VIGIL WITH THE VIRUS - 2020

An offering from Fred Taylor



I'm out walking with my dog, Charlie, thinking about everything that has changed. Recently we moved from our house in the country to a condo in town. I've gotten used to these changes and am happy to walk with Charlie among gravestones, under huge maples and stately rows of white pines.

But there are other changes I haven't adjusted to so well. Climate change has continued to worsen, with the latest report of the IPCC documenting accelerated sea level rise due to the melting ice sheets in Greenland and Antarctica. Wildfires surged across the west, and Australia was laid waste by fires, with over a billion animals killed. Scientists agree, we don't have much time to waste.

And now, a virus that probably leaped to humans in a market in a

Chinese city has spread into a world-wide pandemic, sickening and killing millions of humans and forcing all of us into social distancing, stay-at-home orders and closed businesses.

So I have a lot on my mind today. Plus it's Good Friday, so everything appears through the lens of this season – the darkness of the day of Jesus' crucifixion. Good Friday feels even more poignant this year, because we can't gather in person for Holy Week and have to do it by Zoom. What will Easter morning feel like through a computer screen? I've put on a face mask, but it's hard to breathe in the fresh air of a spring morning through the cloth that clings to my face. Clouds hover over the top of Mt. Wantastiquet, their edges burnished gold.

A favorite song from the Guilford church comes to mind and I sing to the sunrise. "Curtain of daybreak, it is hanging, the wind it whispers a morning grace." The words capture the feel of today's sunrise through clouds over Wantastiquet, reflecting the power of this sacred landscape. "Before the sky you will find me standing, let me live in this holy place." My voice catches on those last words. Charlie looks up at me quizzically, wondering what's wrong.

Different places I consider Holy come to mind, and I realize that these places are also wounded, by the accumulating impacts of climate change, continuing biodiversity loss and growing extinction rates. It strikes me that in nature, as in the passion story, that which is holy has been broken. Yet I sense how the holiness shines through the brokenness as the sun gilds these clouds. Could it be that that which has been broken also becomes holy? I think of Jesus' words at the Last Supper: "This is my body, which is broken for you." Jesus' body, broken and nailed to a cross, somehow transformed into a sacrament, somehow transformed into a resurrection.

[Read more of Fred's reflection HERE on what this all has to do with the pandemic, crucifixion and resurrection.](#)



Peacemakers Pulpit - Holy Week Special Edition Resurrection: Restoration

Our Lord's passage from crucifixion to resurrection plays out once a year in Holy Week on the west end of Main Street, Hyde Park, at Second Congregational UCC. On the east end, it happens every week of the year at Lamoille Restorative Center (LRC).

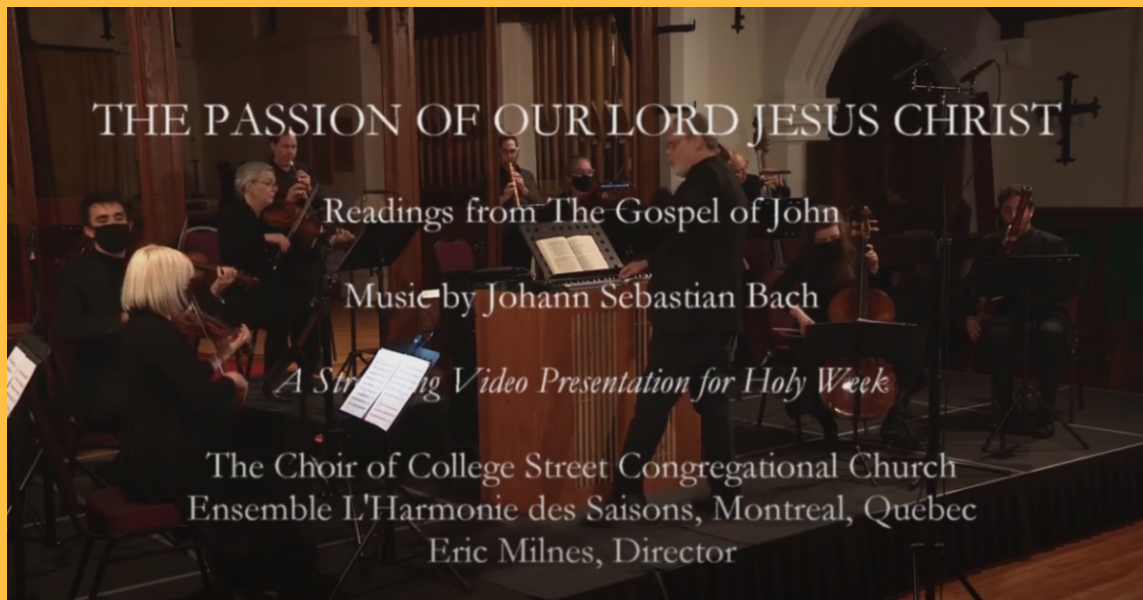
A young man, full of his abusive father's rage, picks a fight over a parking spot at his condominium village. Charged with disturbing the peace, he is referred by the court to a reparative circle at LRC. As a volunteer, I sit with other volunteers and a staff facilitator to work with this man to bring the harm to light, ask how amends can be made, and, yes, address the anger management issues that contributed to the offense.

An older woman who has gradually lost control of her drinking drives intoxicated, crashes her car into another car at a busy intersection. Fortunately, no one is killed. At LRC, with the patient help of the reparative circle, she names the harm, owns her responsibility, and works on repairing what damage she can. Resurrection, in this case, equals addiction recovery.

Countless cases of people amending their lives make up the hidden legacy of restorative programs in every county in Vermont, and, now, increasingly, in most states, and on every continent. Like leaven in the loaf of a punitive criminal justice system, restorative process brings a redemptive orientation not only to correcting behavior, but also, more widely, repairing lives which have been damaged, in many cases, by crucifying trauma.

In Easter season, may we focus year-round on resurrection as restoration – in families, schools, communities, and between nations.

Rev Dr Michael Caldwell, North Wolcott, Vermont



The Passion of Jesus Christ According to the Gospel of John 8 PM Friday April 2nd

Readings from the Gospel of John, music of Johann Sebastian Bach presented by the Choir of College Street Congregational Church and Ensemble L'Harmonie Des Saisons with reflection by Pastor Kenneth White.

This Good Friday service is open to all.
The link to the streaming video is [here!](#)

ONLY THREE WEEKS UNTIL ANNUAL MEETING!!!

**The 226th Vermont Conference
Annual Meeting will take place**

April 23 - 24 on Zoom!



We are excited to welcome our keynote speaker and preacher the **Rev. Traci Blackmon**, Associate General Minister of Justice & Local Church Ministries for The United Church of Christ and Senior Pastor of Christ The King United Church of Christ in Florissant, MO.

Also, on Friday, April 23, the Vermont Conference presents a special panel discussion:
"What is the Minority Experience in Vermont?"

For more information on both of these exciting Conference Events, [click here!](#)
You can also [Register Here!](#)

NEW WORKSHOP FOR ANNUAL MEETING!!!

Music and Art Playshop!
with Christopher Bakriges

Music, art, and storytelling combine in celebrating the artistry of God's creation and the challenges we face as a global community. Interact and create with clay, poetry, pen, pencil, colored paper, and scissors all set to live musical accompaniment. Come play in the waters of your own artistic muse.

If you would like to sign up for this Workshop and you have already registered for Annual Meeting, please email Elise at vermontconference@gmail.com !!!

Yes, there will be

Peacemakers Gathering at Annual Meeting!

Friday, April 23 beginning at 3:30 p.m.

Meeting via Zoom will make attendance possible for EVERYONE who has a story to tell! What kind of story? We want you to share about a project, program, initiative or action your church is involved in that increases peace with justice in our world. Have you recently been working on or learning about: climate change, global ministry, food insecurity, advocating for marginalized groups, housing issues, racial justice, gun violence or the violence of war, human trafficking, migrant or refugee ministries, or just bringing people together to promote peace and love in your community? These are examples – the sky's the limit! Your brief presentation will inspire others to consider how they and their churches might get involved in some form of peacemaking.

We will also pay tribute to the late Rev. John Nutting, who originated Peacemakers Breakfast decades ago. This will be the first Peacemakers event since his death on June 10, 2020.

Please email [Theresa Lever](#) with your idea for a presentation!!!

Thank you!

In Our Prayers

Please hold *Tom and Nancy Steffen* in your prayers as they mourn the death of their son.



Tom is a retired pastor of Second Congregational church UCC in Bennington.



A Prayer for Minneapolis by Shari Prestemon

Loving, Servant God, we remember your journey on this blessed Holy Week. You rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, palms waving as you passed, voices shouting their hosannas. You wept over the city, grieving all they did not understand and refused to receive. You experienced the spectrum of emotion: joy, betrayal, brutality, and anguish. You bravely entered into spaces brimming with tensions and anger, doubts and fears. You found solace in prayer & in community with precious friends. You knew bitter pain and yet focused your unflinching gaze on the fulfillment of promises that beckoned beyond it.

You can read the rest of the prayer [here](#)

[New York School of Ministry](#) [April & May 2021 Offerings!](#)

Thursday evenings, 6:30 – 8:30 PM, April 15, 22, 29, 2021
Leadership Theories for a Pandemic-Changing Church

Saturday, May 15, 2021, 9:00 AM – 1 PM
Speaking of God in the Depths of Suffering

Saturday, May 22, 2021, 9:00 AM – 12:15 PM
Working with Spiritual Struggles

You can learn more about these offerings [here!](#)

You can register for these courses [here!](#)

[OUTDOOR MINISTRIES SUMMER PROGRAM!](#)

Are you 18yrs or older? Love the outdoors and spending time helping children/youth?



Watch this one! <https://youtu.be/gecZ0v3BGZk>

Camp will look a little different this year with less campers in a cabin and therefore more counselors are needed. The VT OM Team is looking for counselors for VT Takes a Hike to the Mtn or you can counsel another week. Counselors get a reduction in cost for their own child/youth to attend when you volunteer. No cost for counselors. You'll have the time of your life! The most fun you've had in a real long time and be exhausted every night to sleep deep, breathe in the fresh mountain air, not to mention worship on Chapel Rock on top of Pint Mtn. Click on 'volunteer' on their website for more information. *(College youth – this looks great on your resume!)*

Thinking about coming to www.hortoncenter.org as a camper? Watch this! <https://youtu.be/rLZm8fzCV2Y>

VT Takes a Hike to the Mtn
Deans: Laurie Chipman & Diane Tinkham
for those going into 5th – 8th in the fall
July 18-24, 2021



VT @ the Lake is taking a hiatus from the lake at Rock Point and hiking to the Mountain! Come join us up at Pine Mountain and unite with middle schoolers from the Green (VT) and White (NH) Mountains. God's spirit will be in all we do at camp this week as we hike, play, pray, sing, rock climb, do some arts and crafts, and discover our own courage through games, challenges, and much more!

Elementary (3rd-5th grade) and Senior High Camp also offered this same week. Siblings can go together to Horton Center. Different camps, but they will still see each other. Check out all the other camps at Horton Center this summer by clicking on their *Summer Schedule*.

Hybrid Worship Meeting with the Vermont Conference

Are you wondering about how to do hybrid worship in the future? To connect both with people for in person worship and online? Join Paul Sangree and a group of Vermont Conference pastors to talk about these issues on Thursday, April 15th at 930 AM.

Let Paul know at sangreepucc@gmail.com if you would like to participate, and he will send you the Zoom link.

Thanks!



Save the Date: Action on Affordable Housing/Homelessness

Vermont Interfaith Action Needs Our Help!

Join us for a virtual Action on **Thurs, Apr 15 from 6:30 pm to 8:00 pm**.

Our Organizing Committee seeks to build on the rapid housing of our precariously housed neighbors during the pandemic to create long-term solutions to homelessness in our state. We'll present our research, hear personal stories, and request commitments from the VT House and Senate Appropriations Committees to make this goal a reality.

[REGISTER FOR THIS EVENT HERE!](#)

Hybrid Worship Webinars!!!

The Indiana Kentucky Conference is offering a two part webinar series on hybrid worship. The first webinar will be on best practices for engaging multiple audiences through hybrid worship and some ways to structure that for local churches.

The second webinar will focus on equipment needed for this kind of venture, plus a focus on smaller churches, larger churches, financial budgets to meet the needs for equipment depending on your church size, etc.

2 part series webinar event

April 21st and 29th 6pm Eastern

So You Want to Build a Hybrid Worship Experience?

Session 1: Time and Talent (21st)

Session 2: Tools and Tech (29th)

EVENTS AROUND THE CONFERENCE

(Please let us know what your Congregation is up to by sending an email to

VermontConference@gmail.com .

You may just see yourself or someone you love in the eKit or our Facebook page!)

NICKERSON COACHING

Congregations Moving Forward



Rev. Paul Nickerson

Nickersonp@comcast.net

Nickersoncoaching.com

8 Iverson Road, Beverly, MA.
01915

508-930-9327

VITALITY EVENT!!!

As churches re-open, there is a great opportunity to do church differently and to engage many people.

Sat, May 22nd, from 10am to 3pm!!!

Come and learn:

- How to do hybrid worship, both in-person and online. This is possible for even the smallest of churches.
- How to identify the “next group” your church is called to reach
- How to have a month of celebrations as you re-open for public worship
- How to adjust staff and structure for the “new normal” of post-Covid
- Each church will develop an Action Plan

This workshop will be followed by 6 months of coaching!!

Read more about this [HERE!](#)

[REGISTER FOR THIS EVENT HERE!](#)

COVID-19 NEWS

In light of: the growing number of Covid-19 infections in Vermont, increased hospitalizations, the onset of flu season, the potential spreading of the disease during holiday gatherings and the advice of our Governor and experts in infectious disease, we strongly urge that **worship not be held in person until criteria for safe in person gathers have been meet.**

[For more info click here](#)

Self-Care in a Pandemic



[Resources for resilience support clergy through COVID-19](#)

It's been almost a year since COVID-19 irrevocably changed United Church of Christ churches.

Members have become ill. Many never recovered. Countless buildings remain closed—some reopening, only to shut down again.

Congregations worship and gather virtually. Clergy have to find ways to cope and carry on. As Americans line up for vaccinations, health experts warn against darker days ahead.

Eleven months of uncertainty. The pandemic is taking an emotional toll on mental health and ministers are not immune.

Continue reading [here](#).

The Vermont Department of Health has provided new guidance specifically for Communities of Faith including holidays, services, and events. This includes (but is not limited to) precautions and actions for organizational leaders. It can be found [here](#).



Need Extra Support During the Pandemic?

COVID Support VT is a statewide program offering free and confidential emotional support and connections to resources for anyone needing help. They offer a wide range of supports on their [website](#).

SAVE THE DATE!

UCCMA Conference 2021 - Registration is now open!

Join the UCCMA online for workshops, worship services, a wonderful concert, vendors and networking. We will be virtually hosted by the First Church of Christ,

Congregational, UCC in the historic town of Glastonbury, Connecticut. From Thursday evening through the Saturday 4 pm closing worship service, we provide a plethora of activities that will enhance your music skills and give you resources and ideas for new ways of expressing God's Spirit in these pandemic times. We also provide glimpses of the historic scenery around the church in Glastonbury, which you would have enjoyed if you had come in person as originally planned. Join us instead online for a mental reset and spiritual refreshment with a taste of Connecticut.



[Find out more and register HERE!](#)



Online Boundaries Training, May 19 & 20

LeaderWise's online boundaries training workshop is lively and interactive, full of reflection and conversation. Attendees have given us feedback that our boundaries training was a great experience, AND caused them to re-evaluate some of their own practices.

This live online boundaries training is 5 total hours split over 2 consecutive days (1:30 pm to 4:00 pm Central each day). Following the first session, participants are asked to engage in a bit of reflection work in preparation for the second session. This online boundaries training will be conducted via secure Zoom video conferencing.

[Click here to register \(\\$75\) for the May 19 & 20 Boundaries Training with LeaderWise.](#) LeaderWise can also bring a Boundaries Training session to your judicatory tailored to your specific schedule and needs. Please [contact Mary Kay](#) for more information.

Spring Boundary Training Opportunities

The Foundations of Understanding Boundaries

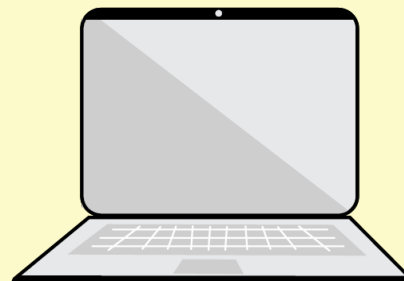
(This is the basic/initial boundary training and should be taken before engaging in other boundary training opportunities.)

Saturday, May 1st, 9 am to 1 pm

Via Zoom

Facilitated by the Reverend Gordon Rankin

Registration Fee: \$25



To register for either of these Boundary Training opportunities, please send an email to: events@nhcucc.org. Instructions for making the registration payment will be provided.

GENERAL SYNOD 2021



Since 1957, when the first “uniting” General Synod gathered in 1957 in Cleveland, Ohio, to the meeting in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1919, the General Synod of the United Church of Christ has faithfully convened a meeting every two years in physical locations throughout the United States.

2021 will be different. We are moving through a pandemic that has taken many lives. This pandemic has disrupted our routines and many of our well-established practices as we adapt to the new demands for safety and social distancing. The meeting of the General Synod is no different, and the 2021 gathering of the General Synod will take place entirely online.

[You can find all the information you need here!!!](#)

RESOURCES FOR ONLINE MINISTRY!

**Do you need help with getting your church services online?
Find resources and help here:**

[Click here for WorshipWell information and resources](#)

[Worship Resource Links for How to Live Stream- from the Southern New England Conference UCC](#)

[Free-Use, No-Licensing Music and Worship Materials here](#)

[Zoom Worship Laboratory Video Tutorial](#)

[How to prevent Zoom Bombing](#)

If you have additional resources to share please email the conference office at VermontConference@gmail.com !

DEADLINE for E-Kit News must be received by **Tuesday of each week.**
Please send any and all information to Elise at vermontconference@gmail.com.

Thank You for Your Support!

Our Churches Wider Mission Basic Support, Association Dues, and Friends of the Vermont Conference make this communication possible.

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visit our website at <http://www.vtcucc.org/>
