

March 2017

# News From the Pews

*The First Congregational United Church of Christ is a thoughtful spiritual community that puts faith into action.*

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## ***From Your Pastor...***

### **“Looking Ahead to Lent”**

This year the season of Lent runs through the month of March into April. As you know, Lent is a season of contemplation and preparation for followers of Jesus. While many of us associate Lent with “giving something up,” for me Lent has always been more about taking advantage of a time of year that tends to be dark, cold, gloomy, and fallow to actually do something positive for others and for God. Lent is a season that is tailor made for slowing down, reading, meditating, and fully preparing for the new life that will soon spring up everywhere around us. It is also a great time of year to surprise someone, to gladden them with your loving actions. A well-lived Lent assures us that the exciting new life of the coming season will spring up in us and not just around us.

To that end, I’ve selected a wonderful new book by one of my favorite contemporary theologians that I’m hoping all of us will read together during the forty days of Lent. It’s called *The Great Spiritual Migration* by Brian McLaren. If you look through the library in my office, you’ll see nearly a dozen books by Rev. McLaren. They are all well worn and heavily marked up, for McLaren is constantly tackling all the most important questions facing followers of Jesus in the 21st century. *The Great Spiritual Migration* speaks of a Christianity that is always on the move, never standing still, constantly expanding its loving reach. Brian McLaren finds tremendous hope in the spiritual movements and trends of the present day. Like me, Rev. McLaren has spent as much time outside the church listening to seekers and skeptics, as he has inside the church as a teacher and pastor. What McLaren wants and works toward, more than anything else, is a relevant, engaging, and love-centered church. And in this book, he helps us chart a course for getting there.

My hope for Lent 2017 is that our entire congregation will read this book and talk about it – in worship, in Bible Study, in Sunday School and Youth Group, and in a series of Wednesday afternoon soup discussions that I hope many of you will attend. This book, which is just over 200 pages, is quite readable, but challenging in spots. I’m really hoping we can all soldier through it. McLaren has divided it into three major sections and ten chapters, so if we used the six-week season to move through it, we’d need to cover about 33 pages per week. To simplify and focus our discussions, I’ve mapped out the following syllabus for those willing to take this journey with me:

First Congregational United  
Church of Christ

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Pastor: Toby Jones  
[pastor@firstuccgaylord.org](mailto:pastor@firstuccgaylord.org)  
Cell: 231-881-6734

Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday  
10:00 am - noon or by appointment

Moderator: Vicky Rigney  
[vickyrigney@gmail.com](mailto:vickyrigney@gmail.com)

Communications Coordinator:  
Maggie Henriksen  
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Church Service: Sunday 10:00 am  
[Church Calendar](#)

For March 1 – read pages 1-33  
 For March 8 – read pages 34-66  
 For March 15 – read pages 71-109  
 For March 22 – read pages 110-147  
 \* There will be no meeting on March 29 due to Spring Break  
 For April 5 – read pages 148-182  
 For April 12 – read pages 183-228



So on each of the Wednesdays listed above – March 1 through April 12 – we will meet in the Parish Hall from Noon until One pm for a soup and bread luncheon and a discussion of the assigned pages from The Great Spiritual Migration. If you would be willing to provide the soup or bread for a particular Wednesday, please let Margaret Soller know. She is in the office Tuesday and Thursday mornings but can also be reached at home on other days and times at 705-7888. But whether you can attend these discussion lunches or not, please make a priority of reading this compelling book. You will be so glad that you did. Please be sure to bring your bible too, as both books will be heavily used.

Let’s make Lent 2017 a season to remember at 1st Congregational UCC of Gaylord. Instead of “giving something up” for Lent, why not give something wonderful and surprising to God, to others, and to ourselves? My hope and prayer is that we will take a traditionally cold, dark, and fallow time of year and fill it with something warm and wonderful, like studying a book that will inspire us to love and serve others in ways we never thought possible.

With Love – Toby

## March Schedule

DATE	LITURGIST	USHER / GREETER	COFFEE HOUR
Mar. 5	Kidz On a Mission	Kidz on a Mission	Louanne Spearman
Mar. 12	L. J. Greer	NEED HELP	Marilyn and Paul Kaczanowski
Mar. 19	L. J. Greer	NEED HELP	Vicky Rigney and Helen Mate
Mar. 26	L. J. Greer	Paul and Marilyn Kaczanowski	Mischelle Stone and Jean Sasso
Apr. 2	Pete Amar	Rokko Jans and Joanna Morse	Helen Mate
Month of March	DEACON	SUNDAY SCHOOL	FLOWERS
	Joanna Morse	Helen Mate	Diane House

### March Birthdays

6	Pete Amar	12	Kay Boughner
8	Andrew Brazelton	12	Scott Boughner
8	Natassja English	14	Maryetta House
11	Eric Anderson	23	John Hellenberg
11	Emily Brazelton	27	Carol Lienerth
11	James Brazelton	30	Ryan Anderson
12	Roger Brummel		

### March Anniversaries

13	Russ (Bo) & Carol Leser
28	Norm & Pat Dressel

## Ash Wednesday Options for March 1st

As you know, the official start of the Lenten season – the 40 days preceding Easter – is Ash Wednesday. Traditionally, on this day, many Christians have ashes spread on their foreheads in the shape of a cross as a reminder of life’s precious and fleeting nature. The ashes can also remind us of both where we came from and where we are heading. Unfortunately, some Christians have misunderstood this wonderful ritual as being morbid or depressing. I think of it in a very different way.

First, the ashes remind me of the absolute oneness and unity of all human life. Death is the great equalizer; it happens to all of us, regardless of nationality, skin color, religion, socio-economic status, or any other category we humans have come up with to divide ourselves. Every time I get on an airplane I think of this same truth. As I walk past the cockpit, the flight crew, the fortunate few in first class, and all the way back past the rainbow of humanity to my seat – usually back by the bathroom – I can’t help but realize that if this bird goes down, we’re all going down. To me, flying – like ashes on my forehead – reminds me to treat everyone equally with love, compassion, and the dignity that all children of God deserve.

Second, the symbol of ashes has always been a positive and effective reminder for me of how quickly life passes. I’ve buried all my grandparents, both my parents, many of my aunts and uncles, and far more friends than I care to count. We don’t get to determine how long we live or even how long our precious children live. So we’d better get living to the fullest extent that we possibly can! Life on earth with the people we love is a gift that doesn’t last forever. Ash Wednesday is a healthy and positive way to be reminded of how lucky we are to be here, to be drawing breath, and to be participating in the building of God’s kingdom.

If you would like to receive ashes this Ash Wednesday, there are several ways to make that happen. One is to attend our first soup and bread lunch from noon to one pm on March 1. As a part of that discussion, I will have ashes on hand for any who choose to receive them. A second option is that I would be happy to come to your home or place of employment between the hours of 9 and 11 am or 1:15 and 2:30 that same day. Just let me know in advance. If these times don’t work for you, just call the office ASAP and we will make special arrangements for you to receive ashes.

May your Ash Wednesday and Lenten celebration be more meaningful and positive than ever before!

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## Keep an eye out for our new Lenten Calendar!

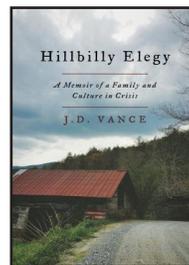
Thanks to Cathy Otto and Mary Evans, we will be making a terrific new calendar available to the congregation for Lent. With an eye toward doing something positive for someone else each and every one of the forty days of this season rather than merely “giving something up,” this “Random Acts of Kindness” calendar will challenge us to perform one concrete action for the good of someone else. The master calendar will hang in the Parish Hall for you to look at whenever you are on the church grounds, but we will also be making digital and paper versions available for you to have at home. Many thanks to Cathy and Mary (Mona’s sister in law) for coming up with this suggestion that fits perfectly with our larger theme for making the most of Lent! Join us on the journey!



## From Your Pastor's Bookshelves...

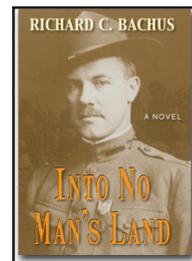
### *Hillbilly Elegy* by J.D. Vance

Mary Fox loaned me this book, and I'm so grateful she did. I had heard a lot about this non-fiction rags to riches story on NPR, and I learned a lot from it. Poor white families in this country face some particular challenges, and they played an enormous role in the recent presidential election. Hearing from Mr. Vance about his "hillbilly" upbringing and the difficulty of overcoming it is a compelling story worth reading.



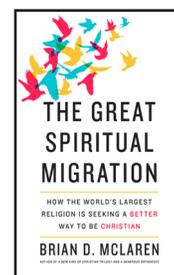
### *Into No Man's Land* by Richard C. Bachus

Rich Bachus is a good friend of LJ's and mine, and he spent years working on this, his first novel. It is largely autobiographical, weaving several threads of his family story together. The first is a military one in which Bachus digs into his grandfather's journey into and through WWI. The second thread is Rich's battle to hang on to his family's land and cabin just north of Harbor Springs in the face of corrupt lawyers and a state conservancy that is hungry for beach front acreage. The final thread is Rich's journey as a freelance writer trying to make ends meet in Northern Michigan.



### *The Great Spiritual Migration* by Brian McLaren

This book blew me away, plain and simple. There is no other book that I consider nearly as important for a follower of Jesus in 2017. McLaren articulates a vision for the future of Christian churches that both excites me and fills me with hope. I cannot wait to share this book with my church family this Lent! Please join us for the journey!



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## From Your Music Director...

### *A Joyful Noise*

Music is a big part of our world at First Congregational UCC! We are lucky to have the talented Sandra Soderberg on organ, playing hymns and interludes that support our worship, and most Sundays I am joined by Toby and Joanna Morse for special music that ties into our sermon themes, often from rock and folk genres. Lately, more and more of our gifted congregation are lending their talents to our services and special events. The Sunday worship that was organized by our Kidz On A Mission youth group featured solos by Harrison Kalember and Anna Fry, and the Advent choir featured many new and wonderful voices, as well as instrumental support from Gage Boughner and Katie Amar-Fox—and don't forget the amazing performance by Gaylord Middle School Honors Choir members (which included several of our church youth).

Those of us who were able to attend the Kidz On A Mission Valentine Fundraiser were treated to a remarkable array of talent—if you missed it, fear not, you'll get a chance to hear our gifted musicians in the Sundays ahead. We are currently putting together programs for Palm Sunday and Easter that will again feature many wonderful voices and instrumentalists—please join in!

-Rokko

## From Your Communications Coordinator...

I've really been enjoying getting to know everyone, and am grateful to have been welcomed into this community! I will be here every Wednesday in March from 9am-3pm, as well as two Tuesdays and one Monday: March 7th from 8-11:30am, March 20th from 4-6pm, and March 28th from 3:30-6pm. My schedule is also listed in every bulletin, as well as the office door, if you ever have any questions. Margaret Soller has been volunteering in the office from 9:30-noon on Tuesdays and Thursdays as well, and she has been a great help! Now that I'm getting settled into the weekly routine, I've started on some other projects to help the church grow and work in its "reaching out" mission; namely, looking into a new and more intuitive website. If you have any suggestions or things you think would be helpful in a new website, please let me know!

*-Maggie*

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## Reaching In, Reaching Out, and Clarifying Our Terms

As a part of our council's effort to simplify and rejuvenate the way our congregation conducts its vital ministry efforts, there are some terms you may have noticed we are beginning to use in and around our church. These terms grow out of the two most important things we do as followers of Jesus: reach in and reach out.

By "reaching in," we mean deepening the overall spiritual life of those who participate in this family of faith. Attending Bible studies, Christian education classes, youth group meetings, worship gatherings, and any number of fellowship activities are all examples of Reaching in at our church. Historically, it has been the Deacons who have coordinated and overseen several of the internally focused programs of our congregation. But many of you have shared with us the fact that you aren't really sure what the terms "Deacon" and "Diaconate" mean. So moving forward, the "In Reach" endeavors of our congregation will be coordinated and supported by the "Reaching In" team. We're confident that by referring to that ministry group, formerly known as the Diaconate, in such a straightforward way will help new and long time participants alike to know who is coordinating that important work in the life of our growing congregation.

By "reaching out," we mean the various things we do to benefit those outside of this congregation. We recognize that we live within the larger Gaylord and Otsego County community, and we also acknowledge that Jesus calls us to take care of others – not just ourselves. This congregation has a deep and long-standing tradition of dedicating a great deal of our time, energy, dollars, and resources to those outside the walls of our building. We host a community meal every Friday, volunteer at the Food Pantry and the Refuge regularly, assist the Salvation Army in its efforts to help the least of these, and give funds and supplies to countless other organizations in and around Gaylord. Additionally, through the United Church of Christ's "Our Churches Wider Mission" (OCWM) program, we even contribute to human needs throughout and beyond the USA. Historically, it has been our Missions Committee that has coordinated these terrific efforts to reach out beyond the walls of our congregation. In the spirit of clarifying and simplifying our ministry, we'll be referring to that kind of work as "Outreach" or "Reaching Out" rather than "Missions" as we move forward together.

Your council is hopeful that these simpler and more descriptive terms will help everyone in our church family develop a clearer grasp of who does what within this very active and giving congregation. We're also hopeful that each of you will have a better idea of where and how to best channel your interests, passions, and gifts as we continue to reach in and reach out together.

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## Plans taking Shape for the Council Retreat

Your council is planning an all day retreat for March 18 over at the Gaylord Airport meeting room for the purpose of clarifying our vision and mapping out how to get there. The first couple hours in the morning will be geared specifically for council members and will be facilitated by Rev. Phil Garrison, a UCC pastor from the Northport Church. But the lunch and the afternoon portion are open to all. If you would like to join us from 11:30 on, we ask two things of you: 1) that you read as much of Brian McLaren's book as possible before March 18, as it will be our focal text, and 2) that you call the office to let us know that you plan on attending, so that we can be sure to have enough food and supplies for everyone.

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## Miscellaneous Announcements....

### Can and Bottle Drive

Kidz on a Mission would like to do a bottle and can drive. With spring approaching I know many of us have returnables piled up. We would love to take them off your hands. We will use the money we get from turning them in for future activities and missions.

People can call or text Lori Ferguson at 989-619-7312 or loriferguson14@gmail.com to make arrangements to have us come pick them up or they can bring them to church.

### Donations Needed

The Church is in need of regular coffee and paper towels. Any donations are greatly appreciated!

### A Thank You....

Thanks very much to those of you who supported our Madrigal Dinner. A special thanks to an incredible bunch of kids and their parents. Chef Hotelling provided a fabulous dinner. Thanks to Lori Ferguson and her Mom, plus their helpers Bri and Zephie for the decorations, and to Rod Anderson for dishwashing. To my friend and cohort, Mirja Hoeft (aka Miss Sue) for being my support, and, as always, staying until the end! What a great evening, and the monies raised will allow us to go on yet another trip. There just aren't adequate words to express my gratitude to this church. -Brenda Brummel

### Book Club

The book club will not be meeting this month.

### Major Team Meetings in March

- March 2nd, 12pm: Women's Fellowship
- March 2nd, 1pm: Reaching Out Team
- March 9th, 12:15pm: Trustees
- March 16th 12:15 pm: Reaching In Team
- March 30th, 9:30am: Council

The full church calendar can be viewed on the church website at <http://www.firstuccgaylord.org/calendar.html>.

Minutes for team meetings can be viewed on the church website at <http://www.firstuccgaylord.org/minutes.html>.

You must be logged into the 'members only' side of the website. If you've forgotten your username and/or password, you can use the general login information. **Username: fcucc Password: 49735**

