

The Spire

From Your Pastor

March 2023

What Will You Give Up? What Will You Take On?

We are in the season of Lent. It began on February 22 with Ash Wednesday. It proceeds for 40 days through Holy Saturday (but not including Sundays, which are always a celebration of resurrection, so not counted in the forty days of penitence that make up Lent). Lent is as much symbol as substance. There's no biblical reference to Lent. Jesus didn't teach or practice Lent. Lent isn't recognized by any calendar other than our liturgical one. But even symbols can be weighty. And Lent is full of them. Forty days and nights: the same amount of time Noah was in the Ark, Moses was on the mountain, the Hebrews wandered (but in years, not days) through the Sinai, and Jesus was in the wilderness fasting and praying and preparing for his public life of ministry. All of these were times of great change and transformation, identity shaping and call clarifying. In Lent we sacrificially, if temporarily, lay aside items and activities (we *fast* from them) to hone our attention and help us to observe the season, be open to change and transformation. Some of us fast from treats, some from temptations, some from trivial pursuits. The three traditional practices of Lent are fasting, praying and "almsgiving," giving money to those in need. The first practice (fasting) is a practice of renunciation; the latter two are practices of affirmative action—which leads to the questions, what might you give up for Lent and what might you take on to more deeply shape your identity in God and clarify your call to a Christ-shaped life? From what might you fast and what prayer practices and opportunities for generosity might you adopt and accept?

Our church offers us many ways to observe Lent. Sunday worship will be organized around the theme of "Seeking: Honest Questions for Deeper Faith" (see specifics below). There will be two additional worship services this Lent, "Lenten Vespers" offering two chances to come together to be in God's presence together using a different style of worship (see below). On Monday nights in Lent you can join a small group on Zoom participating in "Merciful Conversations on Race," seeking to better understand how implicit and explicit assumptions and attitudes about race have shaped us and our society. Individually, we have available to us a daily devotional resource to use online or in print to keep Lent. "One Great Hour of Sharing" will be celebrated during Lent (on April 2), an ecumenical offering to serve economic development and disaster relief locally and around the world.

I encourage you to find at least one thing you'd like to fast from (a habit, an attitude, a distraction, a behavior) and at least one thing you will take on, a prayer or benevolent practice. Lent is a time of transformation and change. Don't waste this spiritual opportunity to grow and deepen a little more.

Grace&Peace, Rev. Jan

Sunday Worship in March

In March we continue our Lenten theme, *Seeking: Honest Questions for Deeper Faith*, as we move into the gospel of John and significant encounters that Jesus had with those who were seeking. Their questions are often our questions. The questions Jesus asks them, are often the questions he asks us.

Sunday, March 5: Second Sunday in Lent. John 3:1-17 *How Do We Begin Again?* Nicodemus comes to Jesus under the veil of night to ask him big faith questions. Jesus invites him to begin again, to learn a new way of knowing and living out his faith. What are the questions we ask in the dark? How do we follow God's calling to begin again?

Sunday, March 12: Third Sunday in Lent. John 4:5-42. *Will You Give Me a Drink?* Jesus crosses cultural, religious and societal boundaries by leading his disciples through Samaria. In the heat of the midday, he seeks out connection with a Samaritan woman drawing water from the well. His command to her is also a question and an invitation to a new way of life: Will you give me a drink? This question creates a dialogue between them in which Jesus sees the woman fully; she leaves the well transformed. In this season, what are you thirsting for? In what ways do you need living water?

Sunday, March 19: Fourth Sunday in Lent. John 9:1-41. *Who Sinned?* Katie Howe, leading. We turn genuine struggles of the human condition into solvable formulas of cause and effect, which often lead to simplistic and misleading answers, like, "It's God's will," or, "It's your own fault." Sometimes we are asking the wrong questions, questions that are formed by assumptions, that lead to judgment. The disciples ask too simple of a question, "Who sinned (to cause this man's blindness)?" Jesus refuses to give a simple answer.

Sunday, March 26: Fifth Sunday in Lent. STEWARDSHIP SUNDAY! John 6:1-21. *Where are we to find bread?* Jesus and his disciples are pursued by a crowd hungry for hope and bread. Jesus gives them both. We, like the disciples, often worry there won't be enough to go around. How can we put what we have in the hands of Jesus who makes whatever we have enough? Today we celebrate the ways Jesus feeds us and leads us to feed others through our Stewardship campaign: "From Bread and Cup, to Faith and Giving."



Special Lenten Worship Opportunity: Lenten Vespers

Thursdays, March 9 and 30, 6-7 pm, in Fellowship Hall. Come join Rev. Jan and Eden Casteel for an intimate and personal service of worship using a format called "worship at the Cross." We'll gather in Fellowship Hall for optimum seating arrangement, using music, meditation, candlelight and simple prayers to gather "at the Cross" during this Lenten season.

Looking Ahead to Holy Week

- **Sunday, April 2, Palm Sunday:** Join for joyous celebration of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem with a palm procession during morning worship.
- **Maundy Thursday, April 6:** Join together as a family of faith around the dinner table that became the table of joy and sacrifice. We will gather in Fellowship Hall for a simple supper and enter the story of Jesus' Last Supper and Passion there around the table. A service of Tenebrae ("shadows") tells the Good Friday story as lights go out one by one.
- **Good Friday, April 7:** The sanctuary will be open for personal prayer during the traditional hours of Jesus' crucifixion, Noon-3 pm. Simple, meditational music and a prayer guide available. Come and go as you wish.
- **Easter Sunday, April 9:** This year with the benefit of a pastoral intern, we're able to offer **two Easter services**. Katie Howe will be leading a sunrise service (Time TBA) and an Easter Celebration of Worship at our regular 9:30 hour will also be offered.

Whoever you are and wherever you are on life's journey, you are welcome here.

March's Deacon of the Month is Carolyn Eldridge. (grauntiec@yahoo.com)

In Sympathy

The congregation expresses deepest condolences to the family of Beverly Stringer who died on January 20th. A memorial service will be held this summer for close friends and family.

The congregation expresses deepest condolences to the family of Ruth Fiddes who died on February 10th. A memorial service will be held on March 25th at 11:00 a.m.

Lenten Resources for Groups and Individuals:

Lenten Adult Program: Merciful Conversations on Race

This year to expand on the work our congregation will be doing with the Witness Stones Project, we are focusing our Adult Christian Education and Spirituality group on anti-racism, being led by trained leaders from the Rhode Island Council of Churches through their **Merciful Conversations on Race** program, five 2-hour Zoom sessions exploring and understanding our ideas and feelings around race.

THE COURSE: Overview

Presented in five 2-hour sessions by trained facilitators. Presentations include video clips, interactive activities and small breakout room sessions. Participants are expected to commit to all sessions and complete simple homework assignments.

Session 1: The Big Picture

We explore the course structure and objectives, establish an atmosphere of safety so that participants can feel free to reflect on their own awareness of racism.

Session 2: Writing an Autobiography Through the Lens of Race

Participants are encouraged to articulate their own journey, using the lens of race to look at when they were first aware of skin color, how they processed that, and where they are in their journey of awareness.

Session 3: Whiteness as the Norm

We explore how Whiteness and Blackness are valued in our society, and begin to discuss privilege based on racial identity on an institutional level.

Session 4: The Impact of White Privilege

We examine how, in the United States, our systems work for the benefit of white people relative to people of color. We explore Economics, Education, Housing, Health Care and the Prison System.

Session 5: Becoming an Ally

Participants focus on the practical aspects what White people can do regarding their own privilege, and learn ways to be an effective ally for Black people.

Based on a UCC curriculum, this series of five conversations will be presented by trained facilitators from the Rhode Island State Council of Churches. The course challenges basic assumptions about race and privilege that often go unnoticed, even by well-intentioned people who advocate for justice. Merciful Conversations on Race explores how White privilege functions in society and mainline churches and the ways it negatively impacts People of Color. It aims to create a positive, trusting space to explore why conversations about race can be such a struggle, and to provide help overcoming this challenge. We'll learn how to foster racial reconciliation on a personal and a systemic level.

To participate in our **Merciful Conversations on Race** plan to commit to:

- Attend all five sessions and to complete the between-session "simple homework assignments."
- Access Zoom (on a tablet or desktop device preferred; phone doesn't work as well)
- Contribute \$50/pp for 5 sessions (financial aid available for any who need it; don't let money stand in the way of participation).
- Stay open and willing to listen and participate in this "brave conversation."

Attendance is limited to 25. Register at this link: <https://tinyurl.com/MercifulConversations>
OR the form at the Harvest Table in Fellowship Hall.

Seeking: Lent Devotional Booklet

WHAT IT IS:

Beginning with Ash Wednesday, this weekly devotional follows the Revised Common Lectionary (Year A) through Easter Sunday. Each week offers: commentary, poetry, visual art, written reflections, hymns and reflection prompts. To use the devotional online use this link: online.flippingbook.com/view/928029194/. If you would like a printed paper copy of the same devotional please contact the church office and we will print them as requested.



Witness Stones Project: Kingston, RI



**Witness
STONES
Project™**

The Witness Stones Project is an educational initiative whose mission is to restore the history and honor the humanity of the enslaved individuals who helped build our communities.

HOW TO BE INVOLVED:

- ATTEND:** **March 4, 2023, 10 AM- Noon.** “A Witness to History: The Big Business of Slavery in Little Rhode Island,” a forum on the history of slavery in our state. Held in the KCC Sanctuary. Special guest: Dr. Christy Clark-Pujara, presenting live via Zoom, on her research into the key role Rhode Islanders played in business of slavery, based on her book Dark Work: The Business of Slavery in Rhode Island. We’ll also hear from Dennis Culliton, Executive Director of The Witness Stones Project on our local effort to recover and repair the history of enslaved members of our community.
- PARTICIPATE:** **April/May 2023.** Trained, volunteer leaders from our KCC community will lead participants in reading and interpreting primary documents related to a locally enslaved individual. We’ll be led through group exploration and discussion, resulting in a narrative to share at our Witness Stones installation. (The Compass School is conducting a sister, parallel project focused on a second individual). Dates/times TBA.
- CELEBRATE:** **June 5, 1:30 PM: Installation Ceremony.** Join KCC, Compass School students, public officials (including Gov. Daniel McKee), at this historic installation of the first Witness Stones in Rhode Island. Held on church property.

From **BREAD** and **CUP** to **FAITH** and **GIVING**.

JOIN US FOR THE KICK-OFF OF OUR 2023 STEWARDSHIP SEASON!

STEWARDSHIP BRUNCH ON SUNDAY, MARCH 5, IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING WORSHIP.

COME ENJOY GOOD FOOD AND COMPANY, AS WE SHARE TOGETHER AROUND THE TABLE OF FAITH AND FRIENDSHIP.

Attendees at our Stewardship Brunch will be able to pick up their 2023 Stewardship packets along with a special gift! At the brunch we will continue the conversation and questions that were shared at the January Leaders' Retreat, helping us discern together how God is calling us to serve in the future.



THANK YOU!!!!

On behalf of The Board of Christian Education, myself and Katie Howe, we would like to thank all of you for your support and participation in our 4th Messy Church event held on February 12th. From the organizer (Katie and myself), our fantastic cook, the activity center leaders, skit performers, our participants and the clean-up crew and especially to Rev. Jan for her support. We could not have done this without you.



It's Time to SHARE

One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) special mission offering of the United Church of Christ involves you in disaster, refugee/immigration, and development ministries throughout the world. When a disaster strikes or people are displaced or made refugees by violence or extreme poverty, you are part of the immediate response and of the long-term recovery.

For over 70 years, the One Great Hour of Sharing Offering (OGHS) has been helping American and Canadian Christians bring God's hope and healing to hurting people both in the U.S. and around the world. Since the closing years of World War II, OGHS has raised funds to support domestic and international development, fight poverty and its consequences, and bring aid and relief to communities torn by war or ravaged by natural disaster.

Through OGHS you engage in holistic development programs including health care, education, agriculture, food sustainability, micro-financing and women's empowerment. Because the UCC relates in mutual partnership to churches and organizations through Global Ministries and worldwide response & recovery networks, your contributions to One Great Hour of Sharing put you in the right place at the right time for the relief, accompaniment and recovery of the most vulnerable. You meet immediate needs and you address the underlying causes that create those needs in the first place.

This year, OGHS offering will be celebrated and received on Sunday, April 2. Alternatively, you can donate online anytime at <https://kingcongchurch.org/donate/> by designating your gift to OGHS. Thank you for your support of this important mission work!

Come and
join us for:



March 12th from 4-6pm

We will be preparing for Easter by discovering what happened to Jesus in the desert, we can find God in our own desert times. God wants to build endurance into our lives, to strengthen us as we follow Jesus. The season of Lent invites us on a journey of hope.

**If you would like to help with this event, please
contact Ms. Cindy for more information**

dirce@kingconchurch.org

All you need is a warm friendly welcoming smile as the rest is all prepared for us.

KCC to Kick off 2023 Beneficent Banquet and Community Dinners

We are pleased to announce the kickoff of our 2023 Beneficent Banquet and Community Dinner event series! Dates will be finalized soon, but we have some great chefs lined up for our fundraiser events, and team captains are recruiting volunteers to help with our new church mission - free community dinners, to be served the last Sunday of each month. Our first dinner will be April 30th. We look forward to offering warm KCC hospitality to those in the community that are in need of a fresh-cooked meal, shared with others. Spread the word, and visit <https://tinyurl.com/KCCMealTeams> to sign up for a quarterly team.

Hint: this is a good chance to invite your friends and family to roll up their sleeves and volunteer with us, beginning a connection with the church in service to others. Many people find it rewarding to offer their time and talent in this way. Maybe you know someone?"

Kingston Congregational Church Leaders Retreat

By Katie Howe

On Saturday, January 28th, about 30 people from our Kingston Congregational Church Community gathered together to discern our future. Although this was called a *Leaders Retreat*, as members of a congregational church we are all leaders of our church community each in our own way. We started with a variety of different ice breaker activities, and we were challenged to use photos to tell our story, as well as the story of the church community. This activity encouraged creativity and allowed us and opportunity to get to know others in our church community in a new way. We then moved into reading scripture which helped us to guide our work:

Romans 12

¹I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

³For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, ⁵so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. ⁶We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ⁷ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; ⁸the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

⁹Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; ¹⁰love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹²Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. ¹³Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

¹⁴Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. ¹⁷Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. ¹⁸If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” ²⁰No, “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.” ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

To ensure that everyone understood the purpose of the important work that we were about to embark on it was important to establish a covenant for the day. This covenant included a variety of things including the requirement of speaking only for oneself, or the importance of using “I” statements rather than “we...”. This covenant also included “be curious and ask questions” and “keeping an open mind”. We used these as guiding principles throughout the day.

To discern the future of our church the day was divided into three different sections. 1) the past, 2) the present, 3) the future. To start, we looked at the history of the church. There were a variety of materials that were shared from past visioning sessions, or leadership retreats, and we were asked to review those materials and discuss things that we have done or are doing, things that we want to do but are still working on, or items that are less relevant to the current work of the church. The next step in the visioning process was understanding what we've learned about ourselves, our community and our church from the pandemic and understanding the new realities that we are facing. The final step of looking toward our future involved a *question burst*. People were allowed to ask questions, but not give any explanation for the question that they were asking or why. These questions were allowed to be any type of question, some being easier to answer than others, and some which may not have an answer yet or ever. You may have seen the questions that were asked hanging on the poster boards in the fellowship hall.

The last step in this process was that everyone was given 3 red dots and we were asked to determine what questions that had surfaced during the *question burst* were weighing the most heavily on our hearts. This was not a question of "what is the easiest for us to solve", but more a question of looking a bit deeper and understanding the things that we want to prioritize as a faith community. Some of the questions that surfaced most frequently as weighing on the hearts of our faith community included:

- How do we keep God/Jesus central to our work?
- Can we keep Matthew 25 central to everything?
- What makes you want to come to church?
- What are new ways to do God's will in our community
- Whose needs in the wider community are not being met?
- I wonder if online worshippers would be interested in more online programming?
- What is the best time for our worship service?

As you can see from the questions that were prioritized by our faith community some of these questions may be easier to answer than others. A small committee was established at this retreat, and there will be more information available as this work continues to evolve. This was simply the beginning of what hopes to be many more conversations. As a pastoral intern I feel honored to be part of a church community that is committed to living the love and justice of Jesus.

The Kingston Congregational Church

*If you would like to give an Easter Flower
in memory of a loved one, please complete this form
and return it with your payment to the church office or place in the
collection plate by April 2nd:*

The cost per Flower is \$15.00.

Given by _____ Date _____

I would like to purchase

_____ lilies at \$15.00 each for a total amount of \$_____.

_____ tulips at \$15.00 each for a total amount of _____.

Please check one:

☐ *I plan to be at the service on Easter Sunday and will take my plant.*

☐ *I cannot be there on Easter Sunday but will pick up my plant in the
Library during the week M-R, 10-3:00.*

Please choose one sentiment per flower:

"In memory of _____

_____ "

or

"In thanksgiving of _____

_____ "

or

"In celebration of _____

_____ "