



NEWSLETTER

Of The United Church of Rowayton

June - August 2010

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From The Pastor



**Something to contemplate
during the summer months -
From the Pulpit, May 9, 2010**

Things Most Moms Would Never Say - "How on earth can you see the TV sitting so far back?" "Yeah, I used to skip school a lot, too." "Just leave all the lights on ... it makes the house look more cheery." "Let me smell that shirt -- Yeah, it's good for another week." "Go ahead and keep that stray dog, honey. I'll be glad to feed and walk him every day." "Well, if Timmy's mom says it's OK, that's good enough for me." "The curfew is just a general time to shoot for. It's not like I'm running a prison around here." "I don't have a tissue with me ... just use your sleeve."

On this Mother's Day and within the United Church of Christ - the Festival of the Christian Home - the passage from the lectionary that we focus on is from the Book of the Acts of the Apostles –

Background

Lydia of Philippi lived about fifty years after Jesus walked this earth. Philippi was a Roman colony in Macedonia, which is present-day Greece. These words about Lydia are all that is written about her. However, Paul's letter to the Philippians speaks of the support he received from the community of Christians in Philippi - of which Lydia was his first convert. Perhaps he sent other letters to the Philippians and even to Lydia herself. Her role as a merchant and employer gave her the skills with which to organize a church and she was blessed with a special gift for bringing people into her life - for building communities and congregations united in the love of God --

Acts 16:9-15

During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." Paul and Silas set sail to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. On the Sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home."

The city of Philippi was like Gettysburg - it was known for the battle fought there a century before. Caesar Augustus had defeated the army of the Roman senate and Brutus. Caesar had made the town a military base, which defined the city's population, and many of its citizens came from elsewhere. The spirit of Rome was concentrated here, the spirit was driven by pride and prejudice and arrogant aggression. The city worshiped Caesar as a god, and also was especially devoted to Mars, the Roman god of war. Law and order were heavy-handed, and violence was just under the surface. There was corruption and exploitation, but also commerce and prosperity.

The woman named Lydia shares in this prosperity. She's an importer of purple cloth, the expensive fabric reserved for the upper class as a sign of rank. She owns a house and property, she's got enterprise and initiative, she has access to cash and capital. She's a strikingly modern woman,

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and this passage treats her that way. She is not identified by any husband's name, which even in our day is worth noticing. She has an independent character and she apparently does not buy the established religion of the empire, even though she depends on its defenders to be her customers.

Because Caesar was honored in Philippi as "lord and god," there was no synagogue allowed. The Jewish faith was tolerated elsewhere in the empire, but not here. So any Jews had to say their common prayers outside the city gates. And it seems only the women felt they could get away with it, or maybe they were just more courageous than the men, more determined, more defiant perhaps. But why is Lydia with them? Why should this prosperous Gentile, we know this because the term "she was a worshiper of God" is translated non-Jew - Gentile, so why would she be praying to this strange god who had proven incapable of defending the chosen people against the gods of Rome?

Let me see if I can help us understand why – One Sabbath a stranger comes to town. This stranger is the apostle Paul and he has a message, basically follow the teaching of Jesus the Christ who rose from the dead and whose loving Spirit is with us - She listens to Paul, and listens long and hard and she believes him. She signs up, she gets baptized, and convinces everyone in her household to get baptized too. Her whole household felt the presence of God, even within a city of the gods of Rome. When she said at her baptism that "Jesus is Lord," she meant it but I think she also meant just as strongly, that Caesar wasn't. Why did she put her business at such risk? What did she hear in Paul's message, that she was compelled to do this, and choose to be identified with the followers of Jesus who was executed by the soldiers and officials who were probably related to her customers? What could Paul possibly offer her, for her to take such personal risk?

She must have believed that Jesus really had risen from the dead, and that behind him was the one God who could truly fill her heart and life with grace and hope and love and that God's presence and love really was spreading in the world, and that she could really feel it and it would make a positive difference in her life. She must have believed in the message and she must have trusted the messenger, Paul. After all, she was skilled in trusting her suppliers and sizing up her customers, she was used to taking calculated risks, she lived by investing her current capital in long-term gains, and now she trusted in what Paul told her and applied her skills to her faith, and her faith

was confirmed and she would never be the same. And then she challenged Paul to have faith in her. Remember she says, "If you have judged me to be loyal to God, then why not stay at my house." I can just hear her singing that old song, "Come on a my house, my house a come on." She is so direct. So open. This is the kind of person you'd like to build a church around. And so, to find the church in Philippi, you go to her house. That's where the disciples gather together. Not just to listen to Paul's teaching and to enjoy his fellowship, but also to sit around Lydia's table and break the bread and pray together. The Spirit of Jesus is among them. God's presence is in her house. She is the host of the church. And her hospitality will define that church for years to come.

My first point in this message is simply to acknowledge and enjoy this businesswoman, Lydia, to be encouraged by her. To be inspired by her. She is an image of the power of the Risen Christ in life, an example of the power of God's love in our lives. This is what it looks like. This is what it leads to; the sharing of love, the sharing of our homes, genuine hospitality. An essential part of that early Christian teaching and fellowship was hospitality, a practice that awed - dismayed even the Roman opponents of Jesus' first followers. Lydia's hospitality inspires me - that's my first point.

My second point is to talk about the church in her home. How strange that the mighty God of the universe should work this way. That this God should overcome the other gods, the false gods, the gods of pride and prejudice, by means of a small group meeting in a woman's home. How strange, but then is it so strange? Isn't it rather typical, doesn't this God's power always work through grace and love? After all, we are talking about the same God who we believe chose to come to this world as a baby in the middle of the night in a stable in Bethlehem.

And how amazing, that what Jesus promised to his disciples in John 14, the passage we heard earlier - how wonderfully amazing that it came true so quickly with Lydia and her Jewish friends. Remember Jesus said, "If anyone loves me, my Father will love them, and we will come to them, and we will make our home with them." The Holy Trinity, God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit had moved into Philippi, and was at home in Lydia's house.

If you wanted to find this God, to connect with this God, you could go to Lydia's house. Her house was the temple of God in Philippi. Over time, to her house would come the people of every nation.

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Board of Christian Outreach BACK-TO-SCHOOL BACKPACK DRIVE

From June 13th through the summer we will be collecting school backpacks and school supplies. Please choose either: Elementary Student Backpack or Middle/High School Student Backpack - Please refer to the list below for requested items. (You only need to include a few items from the list) The backpacks can be dropped off in the Meeting House lobby Monday through Friday. For further information, please contact Bill Peltz at 853-2498.



Please consider helping a child to be successful in his/her new school year.

PLEASE NO USED ITEMS/SUGGESTED ITEMS:

tissues, colored pencils, pens, spiral notebooks, crayons, geometric stencils, colored pencils, compass, drawing pad, erasers, file folders, glue sticks, scissors, notebooks, notebook paper, journal, pencils, pencil sharpener, markers, ruler, white out, red pencils, tape, stapler, staples, calculator

Help Wanted: Youth Leader

The United Church of Rowayton seeks a college-aged/young adult for a part-time position as Christian youth director to lead the Church's middle school youth group (6th – 8th grade). The group meets once a week during the school year with an occasional additional day for field trip or for mission work. Duties include: planning, coordinating, and leading youth activities centered around Christian outreach, spiritual growth and peer fellowship. Reports to Associate Pastor.

Must have a hands-on, energetic personality who connects easily and willingly with youth and is looking for an opportunity to effectively guide/mentor youth in their faith journey. Undergraduate degree or those currently studying education and previous experience with youth preferred. A criminal background check required.

Please send resumes to: carla@ucrowayton.org or the United Church of Rowayton, 210 Rowayton Avenue, Rowayton, CT 06853. Attn: Board of Christian Education.

E-News - Go Green

If you would like to save a tree and receive future newsletters via email please contact Kris Jenkins. Email Kris at: kris@ucrowayton.org

"For Everything there is a Season. . ."

Ecclesiastes 3.1

Births

-- A son, Peter Grayson Davies, to Lauren and Ben Davies, grandson of Kate and Bob Davies

Baptisms

--Taylor Alexis Davies,
daughter of Kim and Sanders Davies,
granddaughter of Kate and Bob Davies

Deaths

--Barbara Sharnik

Mission Survey Results

A big thank you to everyone who answered this survey. We received 97 responses in total, which is tremendous, and many respondents took the time to write detailed comments.

Summary of the Congregation's responses:

Question 1: Is UCR an ONA (Open and Affirming) Church? By "open and affirming" do we welcome all people, including LGBT individuals and couples at our church?

Yes	82%
No	5%
Not Sure	12%

Question 2: Should UCR be designated an Open and Affirming Church in its printed literature?

Yes	69%
No	9%
Not Sure	22%

Question 3: Our Congregational structure calls for us to spend time pondering and discussing the importance of these issues. This would involve a series of meetings involving Church members. Would you like to be part of this soulful and meaningful discussion? To speak out? To make your opinion or feelings known?

Yes	35%
No	39%
Not Sure	26%

Copies of the full report on the results will be available in the Sanctuary and the Meeting House, or you can get a copy emailed to you (send an email to pwb@begoshorgan.com).

The ONA Steering Committee is now working on a plan to provide opportunities for those members of the Congregation who want to learn more about ONA or discuss the issues.

And the food on her table was for healing and nourishment.

Now in that light, let's turn our focus to our Church. Our current Deacons have accepted the challenge and blessing to try to help us all understand what it could mean for us to truly become an Open and Affirming Congregation. I know we all have our own ideas about our Church, and what we like or don't like and what it should be like, and what it shouldn't be like and what we have to offer and what more we could possibly offer. And I believe, no matter how different some of our views might be, we all want to be a healthy church. We want to be healthy and whole, and have integrity and internal harmony as a Congregation. We want to be an open house, a house not only where God comes to live, but also a house where you are given the tools to help you find the God who is living here. I believe that our Church will continue to grow and be healthy if people know that they can find God here, because that's what people are looking for, people are looking for contact with God, people desire an experience of God and fellowship with God, and that is what we have to offer. In a few weeks I will be attending a week long Alban Institute seminar to be held in North Carolina. This course is based on the tremendous new book by Diana Butler Bass - "Christianity for the Rest of Us - How the Neighborhood Church Is Transforming our Faith." This is a very important work - and I believe her thoughts will be shaping the future of local churches - ours included - ours included. In the book she writes about a personal experience she had as she was doing research for her book:

"Not long ago I was at Trinity Church, Wall Street, one of the oldest churches in the United States, and the church that sits at the edge of the World Trade Center site. Since September 11, 2001, more than two million visitors a year have passed through its historic doors. The clergy and I were talking about spiritual tourists, the throngs of people who journey to the church to understand the devastating events of September 11. They are the unmoored, nomads in a fractured world trying to make spiritual and theological sense of the changes - the violence, suffering and war - that have engulfed us.

'I've got tourists galore,' sighed the Reverend Dr. Jim Cooper, Trinity's senior clergy person. 'They come. They come in droves. But I don't want them to leave as tourists. I want them to become pilgrims. I want them to connect, to know that there is something more.' Although not many churches have two million tourists a year, Trinity is not completely unique. In effect, Jim Cooper's words

speak to all religious communities. Every church, synagogue, mosque and temple in the United States sits among a throng of tourists; each is surrounded by people on a journey of self-discovery and meaning. But simply being on a journey does not necessarily mean that people will find meaning. Rather, as Jim suggested, they need to "connect," to discover that journeys can become pilgrimages. Tourists can become pilgrims." (Diane Butler Bass)

That's powerful - becoming pilgrims - remember what we heard over and over again last Sunday - on Confirmation Sunday? "The pilgrimage of faith is a journey not a destination"

I believe with all my heart that if people are going to connect with God here - really connect and become pilgrims and not just tourists - all people need to feel welcome and accepted and affirmed as a child of God, we need to make our House of Worship welcoming, and safe, and wholesome, a healthy house.

That's the purpose, that's the meaning of being Open and Affirming. So that we can say to everyone, just as Lydia said to Paul, "If you judge us to be faithful to God, come and stay at our house." All our welcome - I want and would say most of us want this - that all people, whoever and wherever they are on their journey of life and faith, all feel welcome and are affirmed as a child of God. Now that being said - let me also say that most, if not all, Christian communities say they welcome all, but if you start asking questions - you soon come to realize that "all" is very often defined - by each individual church and denomination and in most definitions - some people are excluded - for a variety of reasons.

Our denomination, the United Church of Christ, has given each local church an opportunity to define "all" as "all" no exclusions. Since the mid 1980s, local congregations and campus ministries, within The United Church of Christ, can become Open and Affirming - Open to and welcoming and affirming every person as a child of God. And this is the most important clarification because it is very often misunderstood - we're able to be open and affirming not because we MUST - no, because we CAN - our "all" can really mean "all" - It's a gift, it's not a mandate, it's an opportunity given to local United Church of Christ churches - some receive it and celebrate it, some do not. For the past twenty-four years I have always been very proud of our Church and what we stand for - when (I could not get myself to say "if") when we become Open and Affirming - I won't be able to wear
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anything with buttons because I'll just burst them all being so proud that we joined the other churches throughout the nation. So as we move on through this process - getting to the point when we, the members of this Church will vote on having an Open and Affirming statement that will simply clarify our Mission Statement - and clarify that our "all" means "all."

As we move through this process, I think it's important for us to think about and look at all the ways we might separate ourselves from those who are not like we are and to do what we can to root it out. So, in conclusion, I want to share a profound story that I heard a while back that spoke to me very deeply and challenged me to see where I put up fences in my life that divide me from other human beings. I'm always trying to be a better person and like I said before, Lydia has inspired me. The story I heard goes like this –

In the Second World War, a group of soldiers was fighting in the rural countryside of France. During an intense battle, one of the American soldiers was killed. His comrades did not want to leave his body on the battlefield and decided to give him a Christian burial. They remembered a church a few miles behind the front lines whose grounds included a small cemetery surrounded by a white picket fence. After receiving permission to take their friend's body to the cemetery, they set out for the church, arriving just before sunset.

A pastor, his bent-over back and frail body displaying his many years, responded to their knocking. His face, deeply wrinkled and tan, was the home of two bright eyes that flashed with wisdom, passion and grace. "Our friend was killed in battle," they blurted out, "and we wanted to give him a church burial." Apparently the pastor understood what they were asking, although he spoke in very broken English. "I'm sorry," he said, "but we can bury only those of the same faith here." Weary after many months of war, the soldiers simply turned and walked away. "But," the old pastor called after them, "you can bury him outside the fence." Cynical and exhausted, the soldiers dug a grave and buried their friend just outside the white fence. They finished after nightfall. The next morning the entire unit was ordered to move on, and the group raced back to the little church for one final goodbye to their friend. When they arrived, they couldn't find the grave site. Tired and confused, they knocked on the door of the church. They asked the old pastor if he knew where they had buried their friend. "It was dark last night and we were exhausted. We must have been disoriented." A smile flashed

across the old pastor's face. "After you left last night, I was saying my evening prayers and I began to feel very troubled and full of shame. I could not sleep, so I went outside early this morning and I moved the fence."

From this story we can ask ourselves, "Where do we have fences built to keep those who are not our kind out?" Of course, most of these fences are not physical structures but fences in our minds and our hearts. We have built them over the years, some built for us when we were children, which keep us believing that somehow we are different and perhaps better than some other people. The story of the pastor and the soldiers asks us to move the fence so that we can include people of other kinds of religious beliefs, skin color, sexual orientation, financial and class status, political views... whatever. I say let's take it even further. Instead of moving the fence, let's tear it down.

Let us pray:

O God, help us to recall and retell and celebrate the stories of the women of Ancient Israel and the Early Church. And create in us a spirit like that of Lydia—open to Your word, eager to receive and act on Your good news, and decisive in implementing here on earth a full measure of Your inclusive love. In the name of the Risen Christ, we pray. Amen.



Congratulations to the Confirmation Class of 2010!

*Lily Kimball Allen
Francesca Katherine Begos
Corey Ellen Blattman
Carly Mitchell Cordovano
Lindsay Peyton Ellis
Nicole S. Jenkins
Christian Yardley Langalis
Connor Day Marion
Dylan Starkweather Marlow
Shannon Christina McDonagh
Geoffrey Berryman Short
Mary Gyllian Steele
Emily Driggs Todd
Henry Chapman Todd
Alexa Gray Weicker*



Summer Worship

The worship experience of our Family of Faith remains to be an important and vital part of our overall program. During the months of July and August we will be offering two options for worship at different times and places. The final outdoor worship service will be on September 5th (Labor Day Weekend). Worship leadership will be shared by our Pastor John Livingston, Associate Pastor Carla Dietz Carroll and the Rev. Holly Adams.

The first service will be held in Pinkney Park on July 4th and will begin at 9:15am. This outdoor service, which has become very meaningful to many of our people, is casual, as people bring their own lawn chairs or blankets and enjoy the beauty of the Five Mile River and the peaceful setting by the gazebo. If it is raining, the service will be held in the Meeting House.

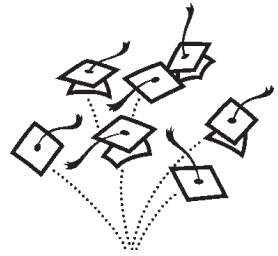
The second service will be held at the United Congregational Church on Richards Avenue and will begin at 10:30am. The same message will be shared at both services. We hope that this flexible schedule will help you to keep worship an important and vital part of your week during the summer.

Summer Worship Schedule

July 4th	The Rev. John Livingston Surprising Prophets Communion 2 Kings 5:1-14
July 11th	Caring Neighbors Luke 10:25-37
July 18th	Word and Work Luke 10:38-42
July 25th	Shaped by Prayer Luke 11:1-13
Aug. 1st	The Rev. Carla Dietz Carroll Soul Investment Communion Luke 12:13-21
Aug. 8th	Living Into the Promise Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16
Aug. 15th	Restore Us Psalm 80:1-2, 8-19
Aug. 22nd	Healing Reign Luke 13:10-17
Aug. 29th	The Rev. Holly Adams Open Table Luke 14:1, 7-14
Sept. 5th	The Rev. Carla Dietz Carroll Being Community Communion Philemon 1-21

High School Senior Recognition

On Sunday, June 13th during worship, we will recognize our graduating seniors. Please join us as we affirm our commitment to supporting our own high school seniors and walk with them as they continue their life's journey into the future.



Memorial Sunday - May 30th

On Sunday, May 30th we will remember all those members and friends of our Family of Faith who have passed away in the last year. Join us for this special service of remembrance.

Associate Pastor's Study

*In the summertime, when the weather is high
You can chase right up and touch the sky
When the weather's fine,
we go fishing or go swimming in the sea.
We're always happy
Life's for livin', yeah that's our philosophy.*

*Sing along with us, dee dee dee dee dee
Da da da da da, yeah we're hap-hap-py
Da da da dee da doo dee da dee da dee da da
Da da da da da, dee da da dee da da*

Mungo Jerry is one of rock's great one-hit successes. Outside of England, they're known for exactly one song, but that song, "In the Summertime" is a seasonal anthem known by listeners who weren't even born when it was released. I have edited it here but it is a song that expresses the laid-back joys of summer. It is not a profound song - especially the lyrics in that second stanza... but it does a good job at conveying one of the great purposes of summer. I hope you will find time to kick back and enjoy the sun, the fabulous beaches around our community and have some fun with your family.

I look forward to seeing you at Pinkney Park on Sundays for worship this summer!
In prayer and in thanks for God's beautiful earth,
Carla

May 23 TEACHER APPRECIATION SUNDAY!
(We hope all teachers attend) 10:15am
June 6 BOCE Meeting 9:15am
June 27-July 2 "God's Heroes" Camp at Silver Lake for kids in 5th and 6th Grade
September 8 BOCE Meeting 6:45pm,
TEACHER ORIENTATION 7:30pm

19th Annual Tag Sale - June 5th



Plans are underway for our 19th Annual Giant Tag Sale. Over the years this event has attracted people from all over Connecticut. As much as this is a fund-

raiser for our Church, it also is a local outreach effort of great importance during this harsh economic climate. This sale, since 1992, has raised over \$235,000 for our Church operating budget, which also feeds our outreach efforts.

This is a fun event and it's a great way to get acquainted with other members and friends of our Family of Faith. If you are new to our Church you will meet so many new people. You can help in many ways - from donating merchandise, or providing storage space to picking up merchandise, receiving, sorting, pricing, selling or baking.

Donate Merchandise:

Items to donate include: china, glassware, small working appliances, books, sporting and garden equipment, jewelry and furniture. New merchandise is also very welcome.

Our ever popular "Ladies Loft" will be accepting donations of high-quality clothing in excellent shape, washed and folded or hung, as appropriate. They also accept handbags, wallets, belts, hats, scarves and shoes in excellent condition.

We can't handle:

Computers and peripherals, clothing, upholstered furniture, sofas, mattresses, box springs, towels, sheets, records, textbooks/encyclopedias, Reader's Digest Condensed Books, magazines, skis or building materials (including screens).

Letters for acknowledging donations for tax purposes will be available.

Drop Off Merchandise:

Tag Sale workers will be in the Meeting House to receive goods on:

Mon. May 31	10 AM - 3 PM
Tues. June 1	10 AM - 4 PM and 7 to 9 PM
Wed. June 2	10 AM - 4 PM and 7 to 9 PM
Thurs. June 3	9 AM - Noon

Bake for the Bake Sale:

This is a delicious way to help out! If you like to bake pies, cakes, breads, muffins, cookies, bar cookies or any other non-heat-sensitive goodies, please sign-up during Fellowship Hour.



Volunteer:

Our ranks have thinned out due to moves, vacation plans and other obligations. We really need some new blood to step forward to help get this sale together and help in any way possible. Workers are needed for the week of May 31st through June 5th. Sign-up sheets in the Meeting House list all the ways you can help for each day. You can be a sorter, a tagger, a pricer, a receiver, a cashier, a seller, a baker or a security guard. Sign up for an hour or a day. It will be fun and rewarding.

Distribute Flyers:

We have "Hi Neighbor" letters that you can distribute on your block advising neighbors when they can donate merchandise to the Church. Pick up a handful at Church on Sunday or in the Church Office.

Come to the Tag Sale and remember to tell your friends and neighbors about it.

Early Bird Shopping:

8:30 to 9:00am

\$10 Admittance Fee.

Spread the Word!

Relay for Life of Norwalk

June 18th - 19th, 2010

Brien McMahon High School

All are welcome! Join a team - gather together 8-15 of your favorite people who love having fun and making a difference. Request your team packet today! Join the committee! Committee members are now being recruited for team recruitment and retention, corporate sponsorship, logistics, entertainment, registration/acconting, survivorship, publicity, ceremonies and food.

For more information contact Diane Smilancsky at dsmilancsky@gmail.com
