

# HINDSIGHT... CAN BE HOLY

Exodus 33:17-23

A look at the previous month through the eyes of our Minister, Rev. Dr. James Gray

MARCH, 2017



## Pastoral Stats

House Calls - 32  
Hospital Visits - 10  
Office Counseling - 8  
Meetings - 5  
Teaching Groups - 7

Specials -- Blessing of the Solar Collectors, Weston Priory visit, Men's Breakfast, Foot Washing Service, Maundy Thursday - Tenebrae Service, Good Friday Seven Last Words Service, Confirmation Trip to Cleveland

## Eat, Pray Love to Study



Our weekly bible study had only one session in April, as we continued our study of 1 Corinthians. We dove into Paul's controversial attitudes and theology of sexuality on April 6th. Our other sessions were preempted by Maundy Thursday worship services, followed by my post-Easter vacation, followed by the Confirmation trip to Cleveland. Our Bible study group has become like family and has been a great ministry to its members, far beyond the study of scripture.



Our Winter book Study, Faith In-side, concluded on Friday, April 7th. Per tradition, our group of approximately fifteen travelled to Doug and Marilyn LaBarr's home in Wardsboro for our last session, in appreciation for them coming to Dorset throughout the winter. We ended our discussion of Brian McLaren's book, "The Great Spiritual Migration," which diagnoses the reasons for the decline in popularity of Christianity in America, and provides remedies for a new version of church, going forward. It was amazingly pertinent, not only for church life, but also for the current political events of America. His book inspired insightful discussion and good therapy. Faith Inside continues to be a wonderful ecumenical experience to help us through long Vermont winters. Thanks to all you loyal participants over these past 4 months.



## Ministry to Interfaith

I have inherited the presidency of the Interfaith Council. A controversy at the end of March, compelled Rev. Gordon McClellan to resign, moving me, as Vice President, to convene our April meeting on the 6th. We passed an assortment of decisions to strengthen our sponsored ministry of Neighbor To Neighbor, and smooth lingering feelings regarding the resignation of N2N's recent director. To our delight, Kate Coss, our former director, has consented to return as our interim, till a search committee has chosen a successor. Karen Allen was also celebrated for her "off-season" work for Summer Lunch Program, as she has orchestrated a mini-food pantry and back-pack outreach at the Mettowee Elementary School. Interfaith's other programs, Auto-Angels, Storage Locker and the Emergency Needs Fund are all OK. Finally, we thanked Rabbi David for his tremendous leadership of this year's Seder Supper, held at Israel Congregation and well attended.

*April saw the culmination of our Lenten season special activities, all of which went well.*



Our Lenten Book Study Group concluded Lee Hull Moses' book *More Than Enough*. We had a lukewarm response to it. Positively, we liked her writing style, which drew the reader into the daily nitty-gritty dilemma of Christian ethics, especially as they pertain to American materialism and access. Negatively, we felt her solutions to those dilemmas were few and her insights into a more faithful Christian mind-set were weak. Our study lasted six weeks. Attendance started a healthy twelve but dwindled in the end with just six. Perhaps we shall reassess people's interest and timing for next year.



Our Maundy Thursday and Tenebrae Service was lovely as usual, but attendance was slim. Our appreciation to the Deacons, who serve communion intinction-style and then read with such drama and sensitivity, the bible story of Jesus' last night and day, from the Last Supper, to his trial, the disciple's denial, his journey to the cross and his crucifixion and death. I offered a homily, led worship and assisted with the Tenebrae readings, after which, the whole congregation leaves in darkness and silence as we approach Good Friday. Thanks to our sexton, Lynn and Pete Jennings, for making the chancel setting so clean and lovely. Thanks also, to the choir, whose music truly facilitates the Maundy Thursday mood.



We had the largest group ever to visit Westin Priory on Tues. of Holy Week. Twenty-three gathered at 5:00 A.M. to travel to the Benedictine Priory to enjoy the monk's typically beautiful sunrise and face-washing worship. The population of the priory seemed slack this year, with only 8 monks, but their singing and spirit still initiated my Holy Week mood wonderfully. Afterward, we enjoyed a great breakfast at Bob's Diner, before everyone departed for work or whatever. Thanks to Dan Zimmerman for driving the church van.



A group of 13 gathered for a tender and bonding Foot-Washing Service on Holy Thurs. at 5:00 P.M. We had a couple of new corners who had never experienced this special service, which, because it is only articulated in the Gospel of John, was never seen as one of the Christian sacraments. Nevertheless, it is certainly a powerful spiritual event that exemplifies the legacy of our Lord's service and the meaning of his death. I offered a homily and lead worship. Appreciation to Jane LoBrutto, for turning the vestry into a lovely chapel for the occasion, replete with candles and solemn décor. Special thanks to Caroline Sargent for once again donating her beautiful foot-basin. Afterward, the service is followed by a pot-luck supper of "ancient foods" - fish, breads, cheeses and vegetables - from the time of Jesus.



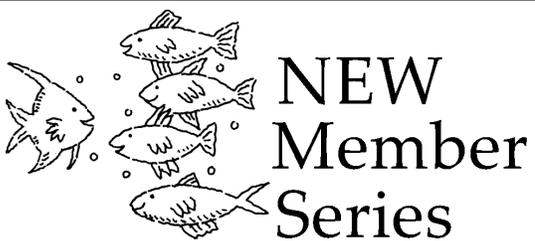
Our Good Friday Service of the Seven Last Words was one of the most moving we have had. Our six homilists - Joel Ario, Derry Dickinson, Linda O'Leary, Al Lindsey, Ginny Longacre, and John Griffith - gave exceedingly moving witness to the each of their "words" spoken by Jesus from the cross. Each year, I am deeply touched and greatly proud to be associated with such people of faith. Their homilies certainly inspired the approximately 60 listeners who attend our service at 12:00 noon. As well as leading worship, I had to fill in and offer one of the homilies, as one of our volunteers was stuck out of town. Many thanks to Jane Wood for her organ accompaniment and special thanks to Sid Staunton for his interludes on his giant recorder, between homilies. The end of our service is marked by the raising of the deep black curtain, marking Jesus' death, that covers, from floor to ceiling, the front of our chancel, only to be lowered on Easter Sunday, letting in the glorious light of God.



Easter Service was triumphant. A full sanctuary was treated to the trumpet music of Tom Salmon, as well as the inspiring anthems of our choir and Jane Wood. Truly we are greatly blest with such outstanding music and musicians in the Dorset Church, who not only show accomplished skill, but most importantly, abiding faith. We gave special treats to the children this Easter:

"Resurrection Scene" kits, complete with all the biblical figurines, which they can set up each Easter season in front of the back drop of wooden "stone tombs". Thanks to Dan Zimmerman and Chris Lima for helping me make 30 "tombs" for the kits, and to Jane LoBrutto, for ordering the figurines. This year's Easter sermon

**PLEASE NOTIFY THE CHURCH OFFICE AS SOON AS A LOVED ONE OR FRIEND IS IN HOSPITAL SO REV. GRAY OR ONE OF OUR PASTORAL CAREGIVERS CAN VISIT.**



On April 9th, I led the first of our New Members Series at the manse, attended by eight of the possible twenty new members. Esther was obliged to be away that day, for a graduation event, so I welcomed folks to the church's manse, and shared our joy for living here.

Then I explained some basics of the United Church of Christ, and, as a group-builder, did my "Wheel of Oneness" exercise, where we celebrate the diversity of our church family. Thanks to Deacon Rich Weinblad for assisting in food and leadership.



## Confirmation

My largest teaching ministry this past April was the Confirmation Trip to Cleveland, Ohio.

We took a great group of seven teens on a three day experience of spiritual growth and togetherness. We left Thursday morning, April 27" at 6:00 A.M. and drove the morning to Niagara Falls.

After a walking tour, film and early dinner at Hard Rock Café, we headed to Cleveland. While Jane drove the van, I led a conversation and bible study with the confirmands on "Entity God vs. Energy God." After seeing and feeling the energy of Niagara, we talk about how God might be "energy." Since Sunday School, God has been presented as "Entity," humanlike, anthropomorphic and often capricious as humans. But the bible also presents God as energy - spiritual energy like "love," "light," "wisdom," "community," "justice," "creativity" and other spiritual energies. They analyze a series of Bible passages and discern which way God is being presented - as entity or energy. Then we discuss the merits of both and which each of them thinks is more the God of their reason. This Confirmation class did well in discernment. Finally we arrive after a long day at our hotel outside of Cleveland.

Our next day is equally long. Our morning is devoted to visiting the home office, called "The Church House," in downtown. We toured the beautiful "Amistad Chapel," named after the slave ship, "Amistad," whose "cargo" were freed by Congregational abolitionists, our faith forebearers, in a landmark Supreme Court case, tried by former President, John Quincy Adams. We received a tour of the Church House, learning about the various agencies who help us "do ministry" in places we cannot go and to people whose needs we cannot personally reach. Finally, we ask our guide to give a basic "polity" course on the governmental structure of the U.C.C.. This lasts the morning.

In the afternoon, we visit the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Like youth everywhere, ours enjoy modern music of all sorts: rock, rap, jazz and folk. At the Hall of Fame they learn the history of all these styles - that they all come from religious music of the black church, the hillbilly white church, or the music of the freedom movement. Certainly rock and roll history is also full of dubious personal morality, but our youth also learn how rock music united the races and classes and represents the social ethic and justice of Jesus.

After this, we traveled to a nearby homeless shelter for men, where our Confirmands assisted with serving dinner to approximately 80 homeless and the washing of dishes. We also ate with them side-by-side.

We concluded the day, back at our hotel, with a pool party, followed by another movie "Pay It Forward" which we use for all Confirmation classes to teach the meaning of Christian mission.

The next day we take the long 10 hour journey home in the church van. Enormous thanks go to Jane LoBrutto for her keen logistical organization for our trip, and our youth Confirmands for their cooperation and exploration.