



# UNITED CHURCH OF UNDERHILL COMMUNITY UPDATE



## *A special message for holy and extraordinary times*

March 30, 2020

Dear members, friends, and extended family of the United Church of Underhill,

Grace and peace to you in this holiest of seasons. As we approach the pinnacle of the Christian year—a walk through darkest valleys into the glory of resurrection—we find ourselves in a place we've never been before. At UCU, care and support of community are among our highest values. In this moment, extending that care to loved ones, neighbors, and the wider world means keeping physical distance for a prolonged time period. What is good for our bodies and physical health is most certainly taking its toll on our hearts and souls, and at precisely a moment when the natural world and our spiritual calendar are telling us that it's time to rejoice.

These are difficult days. We are fearing for our health and the health of loved ones, mourning lost opportunities to gather and celebrate, and frustrated at the monotony of unending days at home. As we explored in worship a few weeks ago, time in the wilderness can bring up all manner of questions lurking beneath the surface. How do we find purpose, meaning, and joy in a time like this? And where, pray tell, is God?

When I ask people where they find God, I typically receive one of two answers: in encounters with the natural world, or through the love and shared life of a community. The good news is that both are still available to us. This is a time when the natural world reflects profoundly the message of resurrection; budding trees, sprouting bulbs, running waters and chirping birds remind our weary hearts that new life follows on the heels of winter's dormancy. And when it comes to community life, even when we are kept at a few arms' lengths, UCU is far from dormant.

Since March 15, we have been holding Sunday worship online via Zoom. This platform allows us to see and hear one another over the web, and it also has a phone-in option for those without or with limited internet access. We see our order of worship through a slideshow, hear music our accompanists provide from home, and share our joys, concerns, and announcements as we always do. You can view the web login on our website ([ucu.church](http://ucu.church)), or call in at (646) 558-8656, then enter the meeting ID: 802 899 1722.

We've been using the same platform to keep our ministries up and running. Church Council is currently meeting weekly to keep tabs on the latest public health recommendations and make sure our church activities are keeping everyone safe and supported. All are welcome to join these open meetings on Mondays at 6:30 pm Eastern. View the back page of this letter for more specifics about how our various ministries are engaged and reaching out.

With Holy Week fast upon us, there is certainly much grief that our sacred observances of Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, and Easter will be celebrated virtually. However, there are many creative ways to share our experiences of praise, mourning, and jubilation even at a distance. Because health recommendations continue to shift, some of these creative expressions will necessarily be announced closer to the time. The best way to know how to participate is to sign up to receive UCU's e-update. Simply send an email to [secretary@ucu.church](mailto:secretary@ucu.church) indicating your interest. If you do not use email and would like a printed copy, please call the church at 802-899-1722.

Though our church building is quite empty these days, it is not quiet. Each day at 10:30 am, we are ringing the bells as an invitation to breathe, give thanks, and take courage. As the signatures in the belfry attest, God has brought us this far. We watch and wait, trusting that God will lead us still.

Pastor Jen



## Socially distanced, yet whole-heartedly engaged, here's what UCU's up to and how you can help:

**Worship** - We continue to meet virtually via Zoom on Sunday mornings at 10:30 am. Recordings will be available on our website soon. You can get involved by signing up to be a worship assistant or offering to share a piece of special music from your location. Email [worship@ucu.church](mailto:worship@ucu.church).

**Prayer and support** - Our prayer chain continues thanks to Betty Wilson. Email [prayer@ucu.church](mailto:prayer@ucu.church) to lift a prayer or be added to the list. Membership and Evangelism is actively reaching out to the entire church family to check in and update contact information for our directory. Expect a call or email soon! Thanks to Anne and Dave Cliff for organizing groceries and errands for local folks in need of help. Email [errands@ucu.church](mailto:errands@ucu.church) if you need supplies or would like to volunteer.

**Listeners** - The Listeners are always listening for ways to best shape our church life together. To support Pastor Jen especially in this time, we ask that you direct ideas and suggestions to [listeners@ucu.church](mailto:listeners@ucu.church).

**Christian Education** - The MICE team has shared options for at-home activities with families, including a wealth of resources on prayer. Our Lenten adult study, "For the Beauty of the Earth" and Women in the Word Wednesday morning Bible Study are also meeting online in the same Zoom room as our Sunday worship.

**Missions** - The Food Shelf is currently operating as a drive-through. Since church drop off sites are unavailable, they strongly encourage food donations in the bins at Hannafords, Price Chopper, and Jericho Market and/or financial donations via check made out to Essex Jericho Underhill Ecumenical Ministry, PO BOX 65, Jericho, VT 05465. The missions ministry also provides several opportunities for online giving to other mission projects through UCU's website.

**Trustees** - The trustees have crafted a policy to keep our paid staff and contractors compensated during social distancing.

**Clutter Barn and Harvest Market** - We are paying close attention to recommendations for gatherings when it comes to these critical ministries of our church. We hope to have both this year, but check back for more info closer to the time.

**Giving** - To support all of our ongoing and future ministry, and as an act of faith and thanksgiving, UCU encourages use of our secure online giving site for pledges and offerings. You may also send checks to PO Box 265 Underhill, VT 05489. Thank you for your ongoing support of God's work at UCU!

## HOLY WEEK OPPORTUNITIES

### **Sunday, April 5 - Palm/Passion Sunday**

UCU Zoom Room, 10:30 am

*We'll wave hands, coats, house plants, or whatever is handy to welcome Jesus to Jerusalem.*



### **April 5-11 - Holy Week Morning Devotionals**

Ecumenical Ministries YouTube Channel, 6:45 am (or anytime!)

*Each morning from Palm Sunday through Holy Saturday, an area clergy person will offer a video reflection based on a miracle of Jesus. The video will go live at 6:45 but can be viewed any time. This is an alternative to our typical Good Friday walk.*

### **April 6, 8, & 10 - Holy Week Evening Prayer Services**

UCU Zoom Room, 7:00 pm

*On Monday, Wednesday, and Friday of Holy Week, join for a brief (15-20 min) evening prayer service, facilitated by an area clergy person. This is in lieu of our typical ecumenical in-person morning prayer services.*

### **Thursday, April 9 - Maundy Thursday Service**

UCU Zoom Room, 6:00 pm

*We'll gather for a virtual service of washing and communion. Bring a basin, bread, and juice to your computer as we remember the night Jesus served the friends who would betray him.*

### **Sunday, April 12 - Easter Sunrise Service**

*Where you are, when you arise UCU will share a brief liturgy for personal or family outdoor worship. Take a picture of your worship space and the worshippers to share with the congregation!*



### **Sunday, April 12 - Easter Worship**

UCU Zoom Room, 10:30 am

*We'll shout Alleluia and proclaim resurrection on April 12, and again whenever we next gather in person!*