

THE HERALD

February 2016 combined with the unfinished January Herald

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:

to find the lost,
to heal the broken,
to feed the hungry,
to release the prisoner,
to rebuild the nations,
to bring peace among brothers,
to make music in the heart.

—Howard Thurman

Howard Thurman, permission from Friends United Press and found in the book,
The Mood of Christmas by Howard Thurman



Saugatuck
Congregational Church

EXPAND YOUR REACH

Happy New Year from the 2016 Stewardship Committee. Now that the festivities are over it's time to get back to expanding our reach. This pledge season we've had a strong response from the congregation, many of you increasing your pledges over last year. We still have a ways to go to meet our goal. If you haven't pledged please get yours in to be counted. We are blessed with a wonderful, loving, dedicated church family. We are forever seeking to do more, touch more lives, comfort more souls, nurture and groom our children. We must all recognize the joy we seek in life is there for the taking and service through Christ is the quickest shortcut. People often ask what it is they get from church not realizing it is often more important what it is you give to church. Your presence alone serves as example to those who need reassurance. Your words, your smile and simply your just being there creates the positive energy that envelops you in God's love. Let's continue to expand our reach to one another and to the community at large.

Bruce Borner and the Stewardship Committee

The Hula Hoop Principle

During a recent Children's Time, we asked, "What shape is our Christian community? What does it look like?" A circle seemed the logical place to start, so we linked up our elbows. Right away, we realized we'd have to break open the circle to let new folks in. Changing tactics, we unlinked our elbows, reached into the center of the circle and grabbed a hula hoop. Ta da! Suddenly, others could join in without any of us letting go. Our circle expanded. The best part: while we each held onto the hoop with one hand, we had another hand free to wave to the congregation and invite others to join in!

Afterwards, we reflected on the difference between the two circles. We realized (to my delight – I hadn't thought about this beforehand) that in the first case, we were only connected to the two people on our left and on our right. In the second case, we were all connected to each other at the center of the circle. How cool is that!

Sometimes, those few minutes of worship with some of our youngest members provide the most profound lessons: We are called to be a community rooted in Christ's love – everyone reaching for the center – with a wide open perimeter. No matter what our differences, or whether we like one another on a given day, we are held together by the force of that love, and called to deepen our connections with each other, even as the circle keeps expanding.

This winter, I've been giving thanks for *all* the ways our particular circle of faith has been both centered and expanding. Over 50% of you increased your pledge in 2016. This is a powerful expression of faith and hope in all that God is doing among us! I am so thankful for your generosity!

We've also welcomed five new adult members and their families in the last four months, with more families worshipping at Saugatuck Church on an increasingly regular basis. The ranks of children are expanding; I can feel their kinetic energy throughout the church on Sunday morning. This is occasion for joy!

There are other signs, more qualitative than quantitative, that this community continues to grow in faith:

In Hoskins Hall, where a room full of confirmands, their mentors, teachers and teen mentors eat, laugh, and reflect together on what it means to live in covenant;

On a Sunday after worship, when new attenders and new members gather in a group called "Companions on the Journey," to strengthen connections and dive into pressing questions about faith;

During Women's Spirituality, when women gather to light candles, listen intently to one another, and explore ways to practice their faith;

At youth group on Wednesday evenings, where young people are big hearted enough to support each other, and courageous enough to ask honest questions, in the wake of two recent suicides at Staples High School;

At council meetings, where our faithful leaders covenant to respect one another, attend to the health of the whole church, and collectively listen for God's leading;

On a Thursday afternoons, when a few members gather for centering prayer, lifting up the joys and struggles of our members and of the wider world.

These are ALL examples of faithful folks practicing what I'll call the Hula Hoop Principle: seeking after Christ as we cultivate open hearts and open arms.

As we enter this season of Lent, may we continue to expand – our community, our faith, our vision, trusting that Christ's love is powerful enough to hold us all together as we stretch and grow.

Thank you, Saugatuck Church, for your faithfulness.

Pastor Alison





Musings from the Moderator- February 2016

This is the time of year that there is a lot of talk about teams – after all, it is Super Bowl time! Most of us think about teams in terms of sports – and competition. Along those lines we often hear the terms team player, team effort. Coaches and players may praise members of a team as being a real team player. We all seem to value that trait in people. It is teamwork that enables common men to accomplish uncommon things. And, at Saugatuck Church, we are blessed with many of these team players who accomplish uncommon things.

During these past few months, I have witnessed many examples of real team work here at Saugatuck, beginning with all the folks who stepped up to fill the vacancy that Alex Marshall created when he left us in August. Under the direction of Stephanie Martenson and Mary Ellen Rose, the Christian Education arena is thriving and growing. Christian Education is filled with many true team players.

I have witnessed real team work with the building of the labyrinth in October. Members gathered every Saturday morning for several weeks, digging trenches and laying bricks to create a beautiful structure on the Great Lawn. Under Liam Borner's and Meredith Lederer's leadership, folks labored, laughed, and prayed as this labyrinth evolved.

The Welcoming and Membership Committee is also an excellent example of teamwork. They have greeted many visitors, provided fellowship for them, and welcomed some as new members in our church.

I have witnessed teamwork with the Trustees, under the direction of Mike Banks, as they have struggled with the numbers, trying their very best to create a budget for our church that will help us continue the great work we do.

The Stewardship Committee has stepped up and worked tirelessly as they have told their stories of their love for Saugatuck Church, and asked people to give generously of their treasures so we can continue to share the love of Christ with each other and the greater community.

And for me, witnessing the teamwork on the Church Council has been the highlight. This Council is filled with team players, who continue to strive to make the best decisions for our church community, thinking only of what is best for the whole. This Council serves together – and functions as a body. Saugatuck is blessed to have such dedicated leaders. And, we all, in turn, have been blessed to stand witness to their many accomplishments.

Peace,

Priscilla Long, Moderator



Excerpt from sermon: *Bigger than that*

Saugatuck Congregational Church, UCC

©Rev. Alison J. Buttrick Patton

January 31, 2016

We tend to see the world through the lens of our own hopes and our own fears. We assume that what we admire, God admires, and what offends us, offends God. *But God is bigger than that.* That's what I said to our youth group on Wednesday evening when we met together. This has been a heart-broken week for the Staples High School community. Last weekend, one of Staple's English teachers, Cody Thomas, died by suicide. Just a couple weeks prior, a 9th grader named Christopher Lanni also died, evidently by suicide. One thing that sets suicides apart from other deaths is the questions they leave in their wake – Why and how and what could we have done? Part of grieving is recognizing that we'll never have all the answers to those questions.

But here's one question we *can* address together, one I believe we must address, as a community of faith. Does a person who dies by suicide end up beyond the reach of Christ's forgiveness, outside God's embrace? Will that person be somehow condemned for all eternity? You may have heard of, or even grown up in churches where the answer to that question is a definitive 'yes.' But I believe, with every fiber of my being, that God is bigger than that.

And I am not alone. Rob Bell (who created the *Nooma* video series that some of you have seen) wrote an entire book called *Love Wins*, to address the question: "What kind of God would save *some* people and leave others to suffer forever?" In the introduction, he writes:

"A staggering number of people have been taught that a select few Christians will spend forever in a peaceful, joyous place called heaven, while the rest of humanity spends eternity in torment and punishment in hell with no chance of anything better. It's been clearly communicated to many that this belief is a central truth of the Christian faith and that to reject it is, in essence, to reject Jesus. This is misguided and toxic and ultimately subverts the contagious spread of Jesus' message of love, peace, forgiveness and joy that our world desperately needs to hear."

The Jesus I know was far more concerned with easing suffering than with condemning people. Far more intent on mending community than on tearing it apart. If he stirred things up, which he did, all the time, it was for the sake of those who are held down or left out. "You think you are better than they are? Better than a poor widow? More deserving than the commander of your enemy's army? Think again."

The truth is those who die by suicide are no less deserving of God's love and forgiveness than the rest of us. We *all* have tangled lives. Some folks suffer distress so deep that they can't find their way out. People who die by suicide don't want to end their life, they want to end their pain. End it, because they feel imprisoned by it. When that desperate need to escape, leads to a death by suicide, does God turn Her back, close the book? On the contrary. Jesus said, "I have come to proclaim release to the captives...." That includes those who are captive to clinical depression. Jesus said, "I

have come to give sight to the blind." That includes those who can't find their way out of the dark valley of despair. On Easter morning, we say that death has been defeated. Not even the grave can stand in the way of Christ's loving, healing work.

We don't always know what to do with suicide, how to find our way through the pain, the anger, the sadness. It can feel like one big failure. Their failure, our failure.

But Sisters and Brothers in Christ, know this, *trust* this: God's love is bigger than our every failure, wider than our widest view; deeper than our deepest pain. God's love does not end.

Nothing in the Bible says that suicide is an unforgivable sin. But there is this: In the early years of the Jesus movement, when the convert Paul was planting new churches, he wrote a letter to the members of a young congregation in Rome. In it, he said,

"I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation can separate us from the love of Jesus Christ." (Romans 8:32)

No exceptions. None at all.

To all of us, Christ continues to say, "I've got Grace to spare, forgiveness overflowing, for any who has need, beginning with those at the very edges of society and extending to the whole, wide world. We are ALL embraced by God's bigger than big, unending love. This is the *Good News* of Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God. Amen.

MEET OUR NEW MEMBERS

Introduced to the congregation by Judy Puchalski



Welcome Benton-Rzeznik Family to our Saugatuck

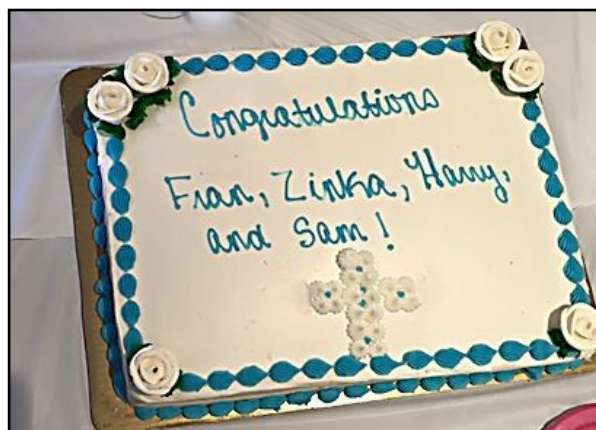
Church Family: Zinka and Fran, Sam & Harry



It is my pleasure and privilege to introduce Fran and Zinka Benton-Rzeznik to all of you. Fran and Zinka have led a self proclaimed nomadic life through the years. Fran, a realtor, on the right, originally from the Bronx, and Zinka, an attorney, originally from Houston, met at NYU, moved to Los Angeles, then Guilford CT, and recently relocated to Westport and began looking for a church to call home. They have been attending the Sunday service here since last year, and have genuinely been touched by the warmth of our community at Saugatuck.

In addition, they feel especially blessed to have found a church with a wonderful youth program for their 6 year old boys, Harry and Sam, who have both entertained us often during many children's sermons. Fran and Zinka feel that we will provide their boys with a well grounded religious education. We are lucky that we will be able to watch these youngsters as they grow within our midst. This entire family is looking forward to participating in our church as active members. Join me in welcoming them to our family..... *Judy Puchalski*

Cake Time at Saugatuck!



SAUGATUCK CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

Notice of Annual Meeting

February 28, 2015

Notice is hereby given of the Annual Meeting to be held Sunday, February 28, 2015, in Hoskins Hall. After the 10AM worship service there will be a brunch for the Youth Mission trip, and then the meeting to conduct the following business:

To receive the annual reports

To receive the Treasurer's report and approve the 2015 budget

To conduct elections and install those elected

To discuss other old and new business

Priscilla Long

Moderator

Janet Canning

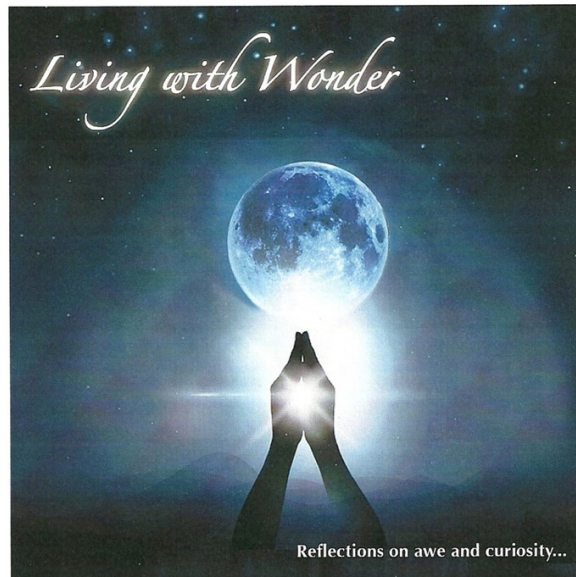
Clerk

Gifts for the Angel Tree—Karen Kim & Alyssa Barone



Anne Patterson being interviewed for television on Christmas Eve

SCC Women's Retreat 2016
March 4th – March 6th
Silver Lake Conference Center, Sharon, CT



Doors open at 5:00 pm Friday;
Dinner together at 6:15 pm;
We'll conclude at mid-day on Sunday

Registration: \$140

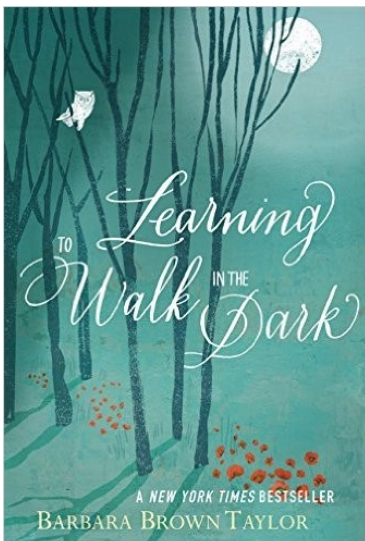
For financial assist. see Rev. Alison Patton

Online registration @ saugatuckchurch.org

Planning Team: Linda Agin * Joan Cavanaugh * Susan Mayer
* Anne Patterson * Allison Patton * Judy Puchalski

Join us – All are welcome!

Women's Spirituality Group: Sunday Afternoon, 5pm, 2nd & 4th Sunday



During January and February, the Women's Spirituality Group has been reflecting on meeting God in the darkness. The foundation for our discussion is Barbara Brown Taylor's book, *Learning to Walk in the Dark*. Taylor suggests ways to find spirituality in those times when we don't have all the answers.

Taylor has become increasingly uncomfortable with our tendency to associate all that is good with lightness and all that is evil and dangerous with darkness. Doesn't God work in the nighttime as well? In *Learning to Walk in the Dark*, Taylor asks us to put aside our fears and anxieties and to explore all that God has to teach us "in the dark." She argues that we need to move away from our "solar spirituality" and ease our way into appreciating "lunar spirituality" (since, like the moon, our experience of the light waxes and wanes). Through darkness we find courage, we understand the world in new ways, and we feel God's presence around us, guiding us through things seen and unseen. Often, it is while we are in the dark that we grow the most.

We meet in the Fellowship Room at five in the afternoon on the second and fourth Sunday of each month. Join us!

Boy Scout Troop 36 Visited Washington D.C.



As you may have seen on Westport Now, a contingent of scouts from Boy Scout Troop 36 visited our nation's capitol over the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday weekend. Seven scouts participated in the trip, which was led by Saugatuck Church member Craig D.B. Patton, the Scoutmaster of Troop 36.

On the first day, the scouts visited the Lincoln Memorial, Vietnam Veterans Memorial, World War II Memorial, Washington Monument, MLK Monument, and the Korean War Monument before having dinner in Chinatown. The second day began with breakfast at Lincoln's Waffle House (across from Ford's Theater) followed by a stop at the White House before dividing the day between the National Museum of American History and the Air and Space Museum followed by dinner in an Ethiopian restaurant in the U Street corridor.

On the final day, the scouts took a tour of the Capitol Building and visited the Library of Congress before traveling home. The trip was a fun and educational experience for youth and adults and plans are already underway for a return visit during a future program year.

Craig Patton, Scoutmaster



February Birthdays

- 3 Rev. Alison Patton
- 6 Sarah & Joshua Berkowsky (2001)
- Marcia Harrington
- 8 Frank Basler
- 10 Bob Yingling
- 17 Nicole Mathias (1998)
- 25 Jim Langham

Missionary Guest Speaker: Michael Joseph

RESCHEDULED: Wednesday, Feb. 10, 7 pm – Hoskins Hall

The Peace Commission of the Evangelical Council of Colombia works with pastors, lay leaders, Christian organizations and entire congregations from many different denominations to meet the needs of the communities they serve as they struggle in the midst of violent conflict.

Come hear UCC/Disciples Common Global missionary Michael Joseph share the story of his 8 years of mission work in Colombia

REMINDER TO DONORS ABOUT GIFTING STOCKS

We welcome gifts of stocks, bonds, mutual funds or other securities. This is a reminder stock transfers may be received at UBS (SCC's broker) with no identification other than the name of the stock and the number of shares. Please advise the bookkeeper at the Church offices of SCC of the details of your stock contribution so it can properly attributed to your annual giving.

Contact:

Rosemary Smith, Bookkeeper

Shirley Anne Rendleman, 87—An Active Member of SCC since 1956

Shirley Anne Rendleman of Westport, wife of the late John David Rendleman, died Jan. 10 at home. She was 87.

She was born June 3, 1928 in Sioux City, Iowa, daughter of the late Joseph and Sudie (Rucker) Heebner and had been a Westport resident since 1956. She was a graduate of Drake University and a longtime member of the Saugatuck Congregational Church.

Survivors include Kimberly J. Rendleman of New York City, Sue A. Rendleman of Silver Spring, Md., and John D. Rendleman and his wife, Patricia, of Tampa, Fla.

A memorial service was held on Friday, Jan. 22 in the sanctuary of Saugatuck Congregational Church followed by a reception at the Rendleman home.

Contributions in her memory may be made to the Gillespie Center, Homes With Hope, Inc., 45 Jesup Road, Westport 06880.

Dear Church,

This Thanksgiving, my husband and I didn't really have a place to go for dinner. Frank had a stroke 3 years ago and is wheelchair bound now. Many homes, including our families, are not wheel chair accessible.

We decided to have Thanksgiving dinner at your church, knowing that it was a community dinner and open to anyone.

The meal was wonderful, the volunteers were gracious, the company was friendly and welcoming and the music was very enjoyable. Thank you for making our Thanksgiving day an enjoyable one for us.

We really appreciated all the effort put into making the day so special.

Warm regards,

Kim Pjecha, Barbara & Frank





SAD NEWS!

The crafters have disbanded due to lack of congregational interest. If anyone would like to continue this longstanding group, please contact Ina Loznyiak at 203-221-1165 and rather than giving the supplies away, she would like to pass them on to those who would be interested in carrying on this tradition.

Ina Loznyiak



10th Annual Martin Luther King Celebration



Marilyn Ward Ford, Neil Cogan Public Service Professor of Law at Quinnipiac University, was keynote speaker today at the 10th annual Martin Luther King Day Celebration presented by Interfaith Council of Westport and Weston, TEAM (Together Effectively Achieving Multiculturalism) Westport and the Westport Country Playhouse at the Playhouse. She noted “at the current rate of incarceration of blacks, one-third of all black males will spend some time in jail.” written and photographed by *Dave Matlow for WestportNow.com*

Christmas Day at Saugatuck



A great Christmas reception thanks to all who gave!

Once again, the members of four congregations in Westport (Saugatuck Congregational Church, Temple Israel, the Unitarian Church and the United Methodist Church of Westport and Weston) worked together to provide a successful Christmas Day reception to the local community. . . .

For this occasion, rather than cooking as we do at Thanksgiving, we accepted donations of prepared foods. And as always the local community really came through for us.

On behalf of the 150-plus guests who appeared to have a grand time, we wish to express our gratitude to all our volunteers and sponsors. Despite the press of the holiday season, over 50 volunteers showed up before, during, and after to make this event work.

Thanks also go to Al's Angels and Toys for Tots for supplying gifts for Santa to distribute to the children among our guests.

And, our sincere appreciation to Bob Cooper and Suzanne Sheridan for serenading us with holiday favorites again this year!

We are pleased to have done all this, and look forward to presenting our Thanksgiving and Christmas functions again next holiday season.

Robert W. Mitchell
Christmas reception coordinator
Westport



Christmas Services at Saugatuck



Left: Blue Christmas, Sunday, December 20th.
A candle-lit worship for those suffering a loss or feeling blue during the holiday season.

Christmas Eve Pageant—Our children with costumes, readings and seasonal music retold the Christmas story



Christmas Eve Candlelight Worship
A celebration of Christmas featuring special music.

Below: Following the worship service there were carols by candlelight on the Great Lawn



EASTER SUNDAY FLOWERS

Continuing an old Saugatuck tradition, wouldn't it be lovely to have a beautiful floral display on the altar this Easter while supporting Pivot Ministry?

Dedications will be listed in the Easter bulletin.

(Please note that Marcia will be on vacation the week prior to Easter, so late orders cannot be accepted.)

Please complete the order form below, attach a check for full payment, payable to Pivot Green. Place order in the collection plate or send it to the Church Office, 245 Post Road East, Westport, CT 06880. **Orders must be received by Monday, March 7th.** If you have any questions or would like to know the full offering of flowers (hyacinths, daffodils, hydrangeas and begonias) from Pivot Green, please contact Marcia in the church office (203-227-1261)

(Kindly wait until the service is over before removing plants)

ORDER FOR EASTER FLOWERS

<u>Flowers</u>	<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Cost</u>
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Easter Lilies – 6” pot (4-5 blossoms) @ \$12 each	_____	_____
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Tulips – 8” pot (8 blossoms) @ \$15 each	_____	_____
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In memory of _____

In honor of _____

Presented by _____

Telephone number _____

PLEASE MAKE ONE CHOICE FOR ABOVE FLOWER DISTRIBUTION

_____ Please deliver to _____ shut-ins or hospital patients.