



# THE HERALD



## *Easter Sunday at Saugatuck*



- Interfaith Service at Compo Beach
- The Halleluiah Chorus sung by the Congregation & the Choir
- Beautiful Flowers
- Easter Egg Hunt on the Great Lawn
- Our Youth placing the symbolic cross in the Sanctuary



# God wants us to do what?



*"The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."* Frederick Buechner

This quote has popped up in my conversation more times than I can count. It strikes a chord with people who are thinking about working for God for a living (ie, as an ordained minister!). But really, it speaks just as directly to any of us who want to live our lives with intention. Remember that book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, by Rick Warren? I suspect it shot to the top of the charts in part because we all long to live with something like 'purpose.' The subtitle, "What on earth am I here for?" is a question most of us have asked, in some form or another, at one time or another.

What I wonder is: Do we ask the same question about our church? We may say, "How will we get more members?" or "How will we balance the budget?" Or even "How will we survive?" But United Church of Christ minister and church vitality consultant Anthony Robinson says the question we ought to ask is, "What is God's purpose for this church?" Once that's sorted out, once the church has discovered what God intends for this particular community of faithful folks, then the congregation can pursue that purpose with abandon!

OK. So far so good. But here's the next question: How do we *know* what God intends? For us, or for anyone? Do we drop Her a note with a self-addressed, stamped envelope and request a reply? Read the tea leaves? Wait for a prophet or watch for a sign (in which case, which prophet? And which sign?). Asking for

God's guidance can feel a bit like sifting through water, with nothing tangible to grasp, only glimmers, here and there.

The word we use to describe that sifting, watching and waiting is 'discernment.' To discern God's purpose, we've got to lean in a bit, listen intently, watch what's happening around us, and take note. Discernment can take lots of forms, but here are a few things we can do together:

**Study** – the Bible! Yes, I do believe that there's a relevant word for us in those ancient texts, that they tell us something about what it means to be faithful. If we study those texts together, we may just get some clues to our purpose. We could ask, "How are these texts speaking to us, here at Saugatuck Church? What might it mean to follow Jesus here and now?"

**Observe** – We can watch for the ways and places that God's spirit is already active here. Where's the energy in our midst? What things happen with relative ease, because folks are excited and engaged? Where are the sparks? A member once observed that the enthusiasm with which participants describe the women's retreat is a sign that we're onto something! Creating space for people to gather in small groups, to connect with each other and with God...maybe this is part of our unfolding purpose?

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# THE ADULTEROUS WOMAN - WHOSE STORY IS IT?

By Michael Hendricks



Have you ever asked yourself who the hero of the Adulterous Woman is? There are four named participants. The woman. Jesus. The crowd. And the teachers of the Law. There are also two implied participants. The woman's husband and the man she was with. Neither of them appears. It's tempting to choose the woman. Her situation is so dramatic. She is about to face a certain and gruesome death, that's also a total rejection. It isn't just one person throwing stones. This is our whole world, stepping forward individually to shun us in the most vicious way imaginable.

Oddly though, we never really get to know her. We assume she's afraid. And we assume she doesn't feel she deserves death. But her only words are, "No, Lord," when Jesus asks if any of her accusers remain to condemn her. She seems to recognize that she has been shown mercy. She also recognizes Jesus as Lord. That's a lot, but is it enough to make her the hero?

So, what about the teachers of the Law? The bad guys. One lesson I've learned, it's always easy to judge bad guys. But it's helpful to see what they wanted, what were they trying to hold on to. Only what they had been raised from birth to believe was good and scriptural and godly.

And of course they were right. Have you ever been right? I'm not talking about two plus two equals four right. I'm talking about that sense in the car when everybody else is lost, but I know this is the way. That sense of we are doing this wrong, so we must turn around and start doing it differently. That sense of why can't everybody listen to what I'm trying to say. Maybe even that sense that God wants things to be a certain way, and, right now, I know what God wants.

It would be at this point that I am probably at my most dangerous.

And what stops them? What stops us? In this story, shame. That thing that happens when Jesus says let the person who has never sinned throw the first stone. And what happens next? The Bible says that one by one, starting with the oldest, they put down their stones and walked away.

And if we want to feel compassion, all we have to do is think of our own shameful moments. We wouldn't all think of the same ones, but we could each think of something. The teachers of the law, though, are not our lead character. They are the antagonist. The villain.

I want to put Jesus forward as this story's hero. He's right when everybody else is wrong. He stands up for the oppressed. Even though he is one against many. Sounds like a movie. Plus, he has the best line. "Let the person who has never sinned throw the first stone."

But there's also this strange thing Jesus does. He squats down and writes something in the dirt. Then, he does it again. So, what did he write? The Bible withholds that answer. And maybe that's the point. Not the what, but the where.

The teachers of the Law wanted definitive answers and rules on how to live. They wanted right and wrong. But Jesus seems to answer that yesterday's right may be tomorrow's wrong and holding on to it too long might actually be working against God's plan.

Which might be why Jesus writes in dust. Whatever purpose the stoning may have served, Jesus implies that that dust has blown away. Maybe mercy now outweighs that condem-

nation. Don't use God's words, Jesus suggests, to stop God from moving us further forward.

And maybe it's even more. Do you recall the familiar line, "dust you are and to dust you shall return?" Maybe we're the dust Jesus points to. If God's command to love God with all our heart and our neighbor as ourselves is written on our hearts, in the dust that is us, we will never pick up the stone in the first place. No matter what.

So, yes, Jesus makes sense as the protagonist, but how much can we really identify with him? While in one way, it is right to set Jesus as the bar we should measure up to, we know that we just won't pull that off. Jesus is exemplary in one way, but I mean ... come on.

So if we're going to identify with anyone, who does that leave? The only one I can figure is the crowd. The ones who came to hear Jesus before the woman and the Pharisees ever showed up. It was to separate the crowd from Jesus that the Pharisees even brought the woman to Jesus

But it is the crowd that chooses to remain with Jesus that may offer our role in this story. We accept that God gave the Law to extend order into a world when it was in short supply. But, with the Law Jesus asks us to write on our hearts, we can no longer limit God's love to

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## FROM OUR MODERATOR



*Last fall I read an article in the New York Times about the Harvard Divinity School highlighting the significant percentage of non-religious students, those not seeking careers in religion. . .*

Last fall I read an article in the New York Times about the Harvard Divinity School highlighting the significant percentage of non-religious students, those not seeking careers in religion who were enrolled in the school. The students cited the study of morality and ethics as the reasons they were attracted there. And while not pursuing divinity degrees like many of their classmates, they really enjoyed being in community with people who were focused on leading good moral lives. Recently I read about a Yale seminar program attracting large numbers of similar-minded students describing themselves as secular, or atheists. This particular program focused on a single question, "How do I become a better person?"

I found this to be an intriguing question intellectually, but what did it mean in a practical sense? What did better mean? As I reflected on these questions I thought about my relationship with my own faith and with my church. Could addressing these questions help me be better at church?

In pondering this question, I thought about what attracted me to Saugatuck Congregational Church. What was special? Certainly a major attraction was that our three young daughters had friends here. What could be better than a Sunday morning play-date with cookies? However, the overwhelming driver for us coming back each Sunday was the palpable feeling of community built on strong relationships and the genuine sense of caring people had for each other.

As I reflected further about my relationship with church, it seemed that over time church had become "hard work." Maybe that's the inevitable progression of relationships in general, that they require a lot of effort and work to keep them strong. As I thought more about this and the prospect of being Moderator, I saw lots of work to be done, e.g., stabilize the budget, resolve Christian education staffing, invigorate Missions' activities, etc. As I started to bog down in the to-do list, I said these are all merely tasks, important yes, but they provide little spiritual nourishment, and, probably not why any of us joined Saugatuck Church.

This led me to the simple conclusion that what really matters is "How are we doing in being church?" Are we providing that sense of a caring community; are we helping people lead lives of purpose? I am convinced that if we do these things well that the tasks will be a lot easier.

My reflection brought me back to the question, "How do I become a better person, and in doing so be a better church member?" I don't know the answer, but being actively engaged in this church that is very important to our family, and working in harmony with people I care about will be part of the answer.

John Walsh, Moderator

**The Yummiest Candy & Cookies you will ever taste.**

..... Meet Alyssa & Diane Barone, makers of the candy & cookies that were sold on Palm Sunday with the proceeds going to the Youth trip to Cuba.



## Great News about the Mission Trip to Cuba – and a Request for Support:

This year's Mission Trip to Cuba will be the largest youth Mission Trip from SCC in at least the last 30 years! Already, 28 kids and 10 adults have committed to being a part of this relational ministry that has the potential to change lives. That is close to double the number of people who went on last year's trip.

With all the excitement around this growth in both the Mission Trip and our Youth Group, we are very aware that this trip to Cuba is a significant endeavor. We are dedicating ourselves to our biggest fundraising effort so far so that no student will be kept from participating for financial reasons.

Our goal right now is to generate \$7,000 in scholarship money. We have some creative fundraisers in the works to meet (or beat) that goal. We ask you to consider purchasing shares or sponsoring individuals. Look for our table at fellowship hour through the end of the year or contact Dana Johnson ([dana21@optonline.net](mailto:dana21@optonline.net), 203-373-0661) to donate. The High School Youth Group Mission Trip to Cuba will be June 27-July 2, 2016!

**Cuba Shares for Sale:** The youth group will begin selling “shares” of our trip during Fellowship Hour this week. Stop by our table and see if you can resist the pull of those young hearts and minds.



**Penny Wars:** What, you ask, is a penny war? Obviously, the jar with the most money at the end of the challenge is the winner. BUT, bills subtract from the total...so you can sabotage your opponent! We have been tasked with bringing art supplies OR sports equipment/games with us to Cuba in June and we'll let the congregation decide which will be the winner. Deposit your loose change in the appropriate jar, and we will share the results prior to our departure!

## *The Easter Season continues! Alleluia!*

The Good News Gospel Choir will be with us next Sunday, April 10<sup>th</sup>, 10 am  
Join us for spirit-filled worship!

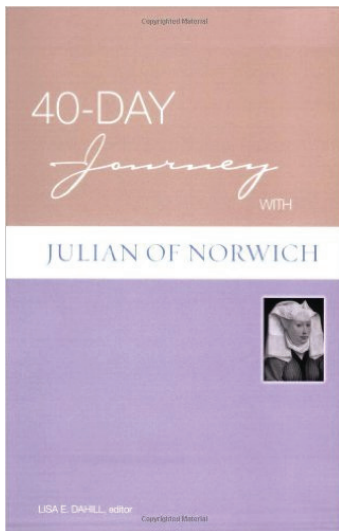


**CHRIS COOGAN**

GOOD NEWS CHOIR	CONCERTS	JOIN US!	ALBUMS
		<b>Blow the Top</b>	<b>Bring Unity</b>
Bring unspeakable joy and energy to your church!	<b>Feel God's Power!</b>	<b>off Your Praise and Worship.</b>	<b>to Your Audience!</b>

**Walk Through Holy Week**, Sunday, March 20, during worship: an interactive journey through the events of Holy Week, for all Church School children.





## Women's Spirituality Group meets the second and fourth Sunday of the month at 5 pm in the Fellowship Room.

The group continues our study of women mystics with Julian of Norwich. Though not a required purchase, we are using works, reflections, and meditations found in *The 40-Day Journey with Julian of Norwich*. "Julian of Norwich was born circa 1342 in or near Norwich, England. Julian's frequent use of feminine imagery for God, her profound vision of God's unconditional love and mercy, and her conviction that: "All will be well...all matter of thing will be well," make Julian a wise mentor and spiritual guide for our times of trial and error." (backcover).

*Linda Bruce, Member in Discernment*



The Pivot Ministry Chorus rehearsing before the March 13th Worship Service

*Photo by Lisa Tantillo*

**Highlight** – the gifts in our midst. Where is our ‘deep gladness,’ individually and collectively? When do we feel most like ourselves? What are we good at? And just as importantly: What gives us joy? When we become totally absorbed in an activity, that’s a sure sign that we’ve touched on something we love.

**Listen** – to each other, and also to the community around us. Remember that quote: We are called to the place where our deep gladness meets *the world’s* deep hunger. So what are the needs in our own neighborhood? What do people yearn for – in our community, our region, our world? What keeps folks up at night? To find out, we need to ask. Then we need to sit quietly and listen to the stories others have to tell. That’s hard work – the asking and the listening. But that’s how we begin to discern God’s voice.

**Pray** – As in: We actually ask God to guide us. Not because we expect God to drop a road map out of the sky (although you never know), but because we trust that God does gently lead us. We can ask for ears to hear and eyes to see. Just being intentional about asking can heighten our awareness, so we notice things, connect the dots in ways we might not otherwise do.

On March 27, we proclaimed that the tomb is abandoned and God is alive! New life is springing forth – among us and all around us. This Easter season, Saugatuck Church: join me in watching for those signs of life, and discerning God’s purpose for us. As we do this holy work together, may our eyes be open, our ears pricked and our hearts prepared to welcome whatever God has in store!

Grace and Peace, Alison

*Reprint of article on page 4, April 2014 Herald, reedited by Pastor Alison*

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only what we are used to. Maybe, just maybe, you and I are the protagonist of this story.

Which brings us to the end. Almost. Because then, Jesus says the strangest thing to the woman. “Go and sin no more.”

He doesn’t say what it feels like he says. “Go and don’t do that adultery thing again.” And if he wanted to say that, that’s exactly what he would say. I think Jesus is going after something bigger— living in a right relationship with God and neighbor, however that might manifest itself.

Only it’s still strange. Because Jesus must know that his words are way beyond our ability to obey. We all sin. We all put ourselves before God and neighbor. Over and over again.

So is Jesus saying, here’s the test. You fail. Maybe not. Maybe it’s our falling short, each giving in to our own temptation, that allows us to live together in the love we were created for.

Because I’m sure every person in that crowd who stayed with Jesus, very soon thereafter, did or thought or said something that separated them from God’s love. Only now, they would know it. So when their sister or brother fell short sometime later, they wouldn’t see them as an “other” who needed to be punished or eliminated, but as a fellow traveler who needed a way back.

And maybe that’s the greatest miracle of this story. Better than water into wine, Jesus takes our sins, that which keeps us from living in God’s love, and transforms them into a bridge of compassion and mercy that makes it possible, no, that demands that we share God’s love with those who need it most.



# HAPPY 150<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY! SAVE THE DATE!

The Westport Woman's Club invites you to  
Bedford Hall's 150<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebration on  
Saturday, April 16, 6:00 – 9:00 pm.

Did you know that today's Bedford Hall, located at the Westport Woman's Club, was originally the Sabbath Hall (Sunday School Building) of Saugatuck Congregational Church? When our church was moved across the Post Road in 1950, the Woman's Club purchased the Sunday School Building and it was moved to its present location at 44 Imperial Avenue.

This building (c. 1866), is celebrating its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary and a festive evening has been planned including unveiling of commemorative plaques, recognition of dignitaries from the Bedford family, Saugatuck Church, the Westport Historical Society and others as well as sumptuous hors d'oeuvres, wine and a birthday cake! We will also have both live and silent auctions. Won't you plan to join us? Tickets are available at \$75 per person. All proceeds will benefit the Woman's Club's Scholarship Program for graduating Staples High School seniors.

Below are photos of Bedford Hall today, and of our Church, separate and moved, with the outline of the missing Hall.



*Contributed by Rose Jordan*

*Cris Xavier . Dan Long . Diane Pollack . Edhu Nascimento . Elaine Clayton . Eric Chiang . Jo Titsworth . Karen Ford*

**ART SHOW**  
at the  
**WESTPORT WOMAN'S CLUB**  
44 Imperial Avenue, Westport

Sat. April 30, 5:00 - 8:00 pm  
Opening Reception  
Refreshments will be served  
Sun. May 1, 12:00 - 4:00 pm



*Lee Walther . Lisa Silberman . Lynn Popat . MaryEllen Hendricks . Michael Brennecke . Miggs Burroughs . Sooo-z Mastropietro*

# COMING UP AT SAUGATUCK



You are cordially invited to a festive Spring Tea Party!  
Bring your beloved American Girl Doll and favorite adult!

**SATURDAY APRIL 9**  
**10:00 – 11:30 am**  
**Hoskins Hall (SCC)**

Charity Tea Party (\$12.50/person - Nominal crafts/activities fee)

*All proceeds benefit the HS Youth Group mission to Cuba*

Tickets: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/scc-youth-group-charity-tea-party-tickets-22457745722>

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**Companions on the Journey, April 10, (and the second Sunday of each month), 11:45 am –**

Are you looking for a space to explore your faith and ask your questions (all questions welcome!)? Want to connect with others on the journey? Small Group conversations for newer Saugatuck Church participants and members, once a month, after worship. See Pastor Alison for details.

**Welcoming New Members, Sunday, May 15, 10 am –** We will be welcoming new members on *Pentecost Sunday*. If you are interested in joining, please be in touch with Pastor Alison ([alison@saugatuckchurch.org](mailto:alison@saugatuckchurch.org)) or Mary Jean Koster ([mjkoster32@gmail.com](mailto:mjkoster32@gmail.com)).

**Story Tent Sunday! May 22, 10 am –** Join us for this worship led by our young people, featuring an original drama, *Hold My Calls: A Play about Callings*, by Wild Camel Productions. All children are welcome to participate. See any Church School teacher to learn more.

**Healing Prayer Service: April 17, and the third Sunday of each month, 5:00-6:30 pm in the Sanctuary.** Hosted by member Anne Patterson

**Women's Spirituality: April 10 and April 24. and the second and fourth Sundays of each month 5-6:30 pm, Fellowship Room (Sanctuary level)** Gatherings may include small group discussion, interactive activities, poetry readings, prayer or guided meditation to inspire your own faith practices. (See Page 7 for more information on our Women's Spirituality Group.)