

## April 18

Exodus 3:1-12  
Acts 7:1-16  
Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16

Moses at the burning bush  
Stephen addresses the council  
commend my spirit

**M**ary Nordquest, mother of two military sons, with help from The United Church of Sebastian, FL Senior Deacon Carole Steckler, packed materials for shipment to Iraq. Members of the congregation contributed items such as cookies, snacks, bug spray and other personal articles as well as money to ship the packages. Children in the Sunday School made greeting cards to include with the packages. Previously, hammocks and chairs were sent to provide service personnel with some comfort during rest times.

### PRAYER:

*Risen Christ, you prepare a place for us, in the home of the Mother-and-Father of us all. Draw us more deeply into yourself, through scripture read, water splashed, bread broken, wine poured, so that when our hearts are troubled, we will know you more completely as the way, the truth, and the life. Amen*

## April 19

Jeremiah 26:20-24  
John 8:48-59  
Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16

A prophet of the Lord persecuted  
Jesus the greater prophet  
I commend my spirit

**O**ne way of testifying to the Son of God is to connect the worship of the church with the mission of God. Several years ago, the First Congregational Church United Church of Christ in Wakefield, New Hampshire, instituted a practice that has become a revered tradition in the congregation. Before the elements are shared on Communion Sunday, the first Sunday of each month, a member of the church's Outreach Committee delivers a mission moment that seeks to connect the celebration of the Eucharist to the mission work of the church. Whether it is an update on conditions in their sister church in Rufumiso, Zimbabwe, a call for contributions for the Heifer Project, a plug for Church World Services' annual CROP Walk or Mother's Day blanket drive, or simply an update on some of the work that Christian missionaries are doing around the world, Wakefield's sacramental theology extends their Communion table across the seven continents of God's World.

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## SUNDAY, APRIL 13

F O U R T H S U N D A Y O F E A S T E R



## Life Abundant

Acts 2:42-47  
Psalm 23  
1 Peter 2:19-25  
John 10:1-10

The believers' common life  
God our Shepherd  
Follow the shepherd, even in suffering  
Christ the shepherd

**I**n April 3, 1974, a tornado devastated many areas of Louisville, Kentucky, and the Crescent Hill neighborhood was among the hardest hit. Area churches came together to assist neighbors with necessities, clean up the rubble, and begin rebuilding. When the

crisis was over, lay and clergy leaders decided to continue their cooperation in the form of United Crescent Hill Ministries (UCHM). The pastor and several members of Grace Immanuel United Church of Christ served on the founding board of UCHM.

UCHM serves the neighborhood through a Senior Program, Emergency Assistance, and a Youth Program. The Senior Program served over 11,000 meals in 2006 (home and congregate), and provided many other life-enhancing services like exercise classes, massage therapy, a visiting nurse, friendly phone calls and visits. A fee-based senior travel program had 837 participants. The Emergency Assistance program served 980 families in 2006 with needs related to housing costs, food, utilities, medications, household needs, and school supplies. The Youth Program of UCHM provides a recreational and enriching program for youth with tutoring, sports, cultural education, field trips, and a Kids' Café. There were 147 students served in 2006.

Longtime UCHM Executive Director Sue Gentry often reminds colleagues that the key to building community is to "bring the right people to the table" to solve problems and serve neighbors. Grace Immanuel UCC in Louisville, Kentucky is proud to be a part of the ministry that was formed out of years of ecumenical cooperation and community building by UCHM and its member churches.

### PRAYER:

*Shepherd of all, by laying down your life for your flock you reveal your love for all. Lead us from the place of death to the place of abundant life, that guided by your care for us, we may rightly offer our lives in love for your and our neighbors. Amen*

## April 14

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Ezekiel 34:17-23  
1 Peter 5:1-5  
Psalm 100

God the true shepherd  
Tend the flock of God  
We are the sheep of God's pasture

Idle hands will never be a problem for those involved in United Church Outreach Ministry (UCOM), an agency of the Grand West Association of the Michigan Conference. The organization sponsors programs to help people find their way out of poverty including classes in English as a Second Language, parenting skills, help in job searches and income tax preparation. One of the meeting places is Smith Memorial Congregational UCC in Grand Rapids where they hold 48 annual sessions of ESL classes. Across the street at Hall Elementary School, 60 tutors read, play and journal with up to 150 children each year, four days a week. They are part of Homework House, a 20-year-old UCOM ministry helping children and their families succeed while supplying their basic needs. In all, nearly 300 volunteers, from college-age through "golden"-age, provide their time, compassion, experience and energy to make all the ministries of UCOM work.

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## April 15

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Ezekiel 34:23-31  
Hebrews 13:20-21  
Psalm 100

God provides perfect pastures  
God's blessing through Christ the shepherd  
We are the sheep of God's pasture

There is abundant life at First Congregational UCC in Billings, MT through their community outreach via grants from their capital campaign. The church's Whole Life Ministry used one grant to buy an unpainted canvas labyrinth as a way to reach out to brothers and sisters, Christian and others, in their community. Painting and sharing a labyrinth would "express their spirituality in mutuality," as the group and parish nurse Susan Ogden put it. Another grant went to the building fund of nearby Temple Beth Aaron and two more grants helped to start an Interfaith Hospitality Network and an extension of a respite program for families of persons with other abilities. The church council anticipates that these "outreach grants" will continue each of the three years that the capital campaign funds are raised.

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## April 16

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Jeremiah 23:1-8  
Matthew 20:17-28  
Psalm 100

God will gather the flock  
Jesus came to serve  
We are the sheep of God's pasture

One year ago today, a random act of violence at Virginia Tech ended the lives of 33 people. "Thirty-three periods were placed in our lives that awful morning. The generous support of our UCC sisters and brothers helped turn those periods into commas," says The Rev. Kelly M. Sisson, pastor of Glade Church in Blacksburg, Virginia. "One person's anger was unleashed that morning. The entire world responded with love and acts of kindness – each reminding us of God's presence in this place," writes Sisson. "God's heart broke with ours. God cried every tear we cried. God was big enough to hear our questions, strong enough to handle our outrage, and gentle enough to be patient as we determined to live faithfully out of this nightmare." United Campus Ministries and Glade Church are proclaiming, "God is still speaking at Virginia Tech!"

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## April 17

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Genesis 12:1-3  
Acts 6:8-15  
Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16

The call of Abram  
Stephen is arrested  
I commend my spirit

Yes, Teddy Bears are a ministry! Joining us each Sunday, multiplying each week, these stuffed critters received frequent hugs and snuggles from Parkside UCC congregants. Not only did Parksiders enjoy the company in the pew, but we pray our love and enjoyment will flow with these toys as they are given to children during times of crisis. The animals were blessed and given to the Fire and Police Departments of Sacramento, CA, and to various hospitals in our area. We keep looking for creative ways to extend God's peace and comfort to people in our community.

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