

March 14

Job 13:13-19
Philippians 1:21-30
Psalm 31:9-16

A servant keeps silence
Seeing Christ in this life
I commend my spirit

You probably know at least one, or you may be one - the person responsible for taking care of elderly parents while still maintaining their own household. With all the demands made on their time, resources and spirits, where can this sandwich generation go to be restored and recharged?

First Congregational UCC of Rochester, Michigan provides a safe place where emotionally spent and overworked caregivers can go to vent, to share ideas and to receive emotional and spiritual support. The Caregivers Group has grown from a support group for church members to include people from the local community who come to gain emotional and spiritual support. Some county organizations list the group as a resource to help people cope with this stressful time of life.

PRAYER:

God of our salvation, we give you thanks for Jesus Christ, our Lord, who came in your name and turned the lonely way of rejection and death into triumph. Grant us the steadfast faith to enter the gates of righteousness, that we may receive grace to become worthy citizens of your holy realm. Amen.

March 15

Lamentations 3:55-66
Mark 10:32-34
Psalm 31:9-16

A cry for help
Going up to Jerusalem
I commend my spirit

Moving to a new home is difficult at best, even when the relocation is a positive change. How much easier it is when the welcome wagon (or basket) hospitality is there to greet you in your new community. St. Paul's UCC in Hinckley, Illinois started a community-wide ministry by inviting local businesses and not-for-profits to contribute items to a welcome basket for new community residents. The congregation adds a contemporary language New Testament, an "About the UCC" booklet, a stress relief pamphlet, a ceramic mug with the church logo, a church newsletter and recent bulletin, and a home-baked goodie. Church members deliver the basket along with a welcome invitation for worship and fellowship at St. Paul's. An evangelism grant from the Illinois Conference helps support this outreach ministry along with materials for a small Bible studies group - a warm, welcoming entry into this hospitable congregation!

PRAYER:

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SUNDAY, MARCH 9

F I F T H S U N D A Y I N L E N T



Out of the Depths

Ezekiel 37:1-14
Psalm 130
Romans 8:6-11
John 11:1-45

The dry bones of Israel
Mercy and redemption
Life in the Spirit
The raising of Lazarus

The Rev. David Taylor, pastor of First Church of Christ UCC in Glastonbury, Connecticut, has been involved with CHHSM member Back Bay Mission for more than thirty years. His devotion has been

unfailing, and in 2007, he was awarded CHHSM's Faithful Trustee Award.

In the midst of Hurricane Katrina, Taylor, who was then president of Back Bay's Board of Directors, maintained cell phone contact with the ministry's staff and immediately began to organize broad-based support for Back Bay's recovery. As we now know, Katrina's devastation was unprecedented. Back Bay Mission's six buildings, all files and records, every piece of technology, many clients, and the historic poor neighborhoods that the agency had served for eight decades were all gone.

However, during the difficult and seemingly endless recovery, Taylor's confidence and empathy were hallmarks of his leadership. The Rev. Shari Prestemon, executive director of Back Bay Mission, writes that "His leadership was both an anchor and wings – steady and rooted enough to provide stability in the midst of chaos, imaginative and ambitious enough to help us soar beyond the multitude of obstacles before us."

Now Back Bay Mission is continuing to recover from Hurricane Katrina by finding new ways to serve those in need on the Gulf Coast, and Taylor has agreed to continue his service as a committed servant, trusted confidant, advocate, and true friend to Back Bay Mission in the newly created position of immediate past president.

PRAYER:

God of all consolation and compassion, your Son comforted the grieving sisters, Martha and Mary; your breath alone brings life to dry bones and weary souls. Pour out your Spirit upon us, that we may face despair and death with the hope of resurrection and faith in the One who called Lazarus forth from the grave. Amen.

March 10

1 Kings 17:17-24
Acts 20:7-12
Psalm 143

Elijah raises the widow's son
Paul raises a young man
Save me from death

Who are the broken among us and how do we minister to them? In responding to this question, Immanuel United Church of Christ in Shillington, PA saw the need for healing and reconciliation among its members and in the community. The church addresses these needs through a network of support groups that offer understanding, caring, and listening ministries to these people. To date, Immanuel facilitates six groups that meet monthly. These groups offer support for those who are caregivers to aging parents or friends; those who are in the throes of separation or divorce; those who have suffered the loss of a loved one; those who have suffered miscarriage, stillbirth and infant death, and those who are cancer patients. Immanuel's support group ministry responds to the question of brokenness and helps to lift everyone Out of the Depths.

P R A Y E R :

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March 11

2 Kings 4:18-37
Ephesians 2:1-10
Psalm 143

Elisha raises a child from death
Alive in Christ
Save me from death

What wonderful things we can accomplish with the gift of knowledge and how important it is for all children to have equal educational opportunities. Seekonk Congregational Church in Massachusetts is working toward offering those opportunities as part of their community outreach by supporting the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP). This independent yet public school serves urban at-risk middle school students who have had limited opportunities and past difficulties in school. The innovative alternative school in Providence empowers students to achieve at high levels and gives them a second chance to enter high school with better skills, attitudes and habits. The school's founder and director, Rob DeBlois, is a member of Seekonk UCC and encourages the congregation to assist with fund-raisers and adopt families in the school at holiday times to provide gifts and food.

P R A Y E R :

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March 12

Jeremiah 32:1-9, 36-41
Matthew 22:23-33
Psalm 143

Jeremiah buys a field
God of the living
Save me from death

Labyrinths have long been considered a metaphor for life. The concentric circles bring us deeper into the core as we walk, while leading us back to the outer rings with every full turn. Life, too, draws us deeper into our being - perhaps to the sacred core - while we still maintain the push and pull of everyday life. South Congregational Church in Concord, New Hampshire created its own portable labyrinth out of purple canvas, painted by 50 or so members of the congregation. Before painting, each member lit a candle in honor of someone on their spiritual journey, told the group about that person and then wrote a message of love and appreciation on the canvas. Beneath the paint of the labyrinth lie the love, prayers and compassion of church members. The labyrinth has been used during holy week and the creators hope it will be used often for healing, celebration and grieving.

P R A Y E R :

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March 13

1 Samuel 16:11-13
Philippians 1:1-11
Psalm 31:9-16

Samuel anoints David
Encouraged to follow Christ's righteousness
I commend my spirit

Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Holy Week. As early as the fourth century, the church in Jerusalem began the custom of reenacting the entry of Jesus into the city. At the Mount of Olives, people gathered to hear the gospel passages about the triumphal entry. A procession then followed into the city. People held palm branches and sang, "Hosanna!" The tradition spread and has taken on many different expressions throughout the Christian church.

At Christ Church in Summit, NJ, we will hold "Walk through Holy Week" on Palm/Passion Sunday, following worship. The adults and older youth in the congregation are invited, as they leave worship, to walk through the educational building, where the pre-k class through 8th graders will present tableaux of the Passion Week – from Palm Sunday through the Resurrection. Each class will re-enact a scene, frozen in place, for the congregation to see as they walk through the building.

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