

MINISTER'S COLUMN, Scott Couper

"[Elijah] came to a broom tree, sat under it and prayed that he might die. 'I have had enough, Lord,' he said. 'Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors'". - I Kings 19:4

When I was about fourteen, I was depressed. I didn't know it then. But I realize now I was likely 'clinically' depressed. I remember having no desire to bathe, and I didn't for days. I remember dreading going to school in the morning while it was still dark. We had just moved across the country. I had no friends. I had terrible acne. I don't recall a home life, as my mother worked and my step-father was on a submarine out to sea for months on end. I was depressed.

When I was forty-five, from my perspective, my wife suddenly and unexpectedly pursued a divorce. I was worse than depressed. I fell apart. I couldn't sleep. I had high blood pressure. I lost weight, fast. I lost perspective. I had to keep things together for my kids. I had to still seek a calling from Centre Church! I needed help. An urgent care facility prescribed me anti-anxiety medication. It took the edge off. Sleeping pills helped me rest, so I could think straight. Medication normalized my high blood pressure. I sought counselling. I ran many miles every day. Best thing ever.

I believe Elijah was 'depressed'. He may not have termed it that. In the Ancient Near East there was likely no such clinical diagnosis. Yet, I can feel the depth of his despair when he confided to God, "I'm done".

There was good reason for that fourteen year-old boy to be depressed. There was good reason for that forty-five year old man to be depressed. There was good reason for Elijah to be depressed. Depression was not our fault!

We are living through, and some are dying in, a season of medical and political crisis. I am suffering from isolation. The days are colder and darker. Many, dare I say, all, of you are suffering like me from social distancing. We are ZOOMed-out. Our former lives have been torn away. Our children and the elderly are especially suffering as they have less agency than others. Our frontline health care workers must be on the edge of sanity most days, dealing with the dead and dying every day at work. And families who grieve the loss of a loved one, perhaps without ever being able to say goodbye must be in agony. And those who are sick in an ICU unit...I am overwhelmed just writing this. We all have good reason to be depressed.

And for some, depression is biochemical, and context only exacerbates that which is already inherently unbearable: the loss of perspective, the loss of hope. Depression is not their fault either!

"The angel of the Lord came and touched him and said, 'Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you'. So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he travelled". I Kings 19:7-8

First, I want to say that if you are suffering from depression, it is not your fault. There is good reason to be. Second, seek out help like I did. Third, I want you to be an angel to someone who is also struggling like you. I encourage you to reach-out to someone struggling like the angel did to Elijah, by phone, e-mail, card, and a safe visit. The journey is hard. Offer them something to revive them. They will be strengthened for the journey. And so also will you. Be well.

Love always in Christ, Scott

CENTRE BELLS

December 2020

The newsletter of

**Centre Congregational Church
United Church of Christ**



For mental health resources you are free to call:

Scott Couper, Minister of Centre Congregational Church
786.622.8473/centrepastor@centrechurchvt.org

Crisis Care Center (of Health Care and Rehabilitation Services)

208 Linden Street, Brattleboro, VT, 800.622.4235/<http://www.hcrs.org/>

Members of the Crisis Team provide crisis stabilization support in a safe and supportive environment.

People seen in the Crisis Care Center have a much shorter wait time than in a hospital emergency room. Hours: Monday - Friday 9:00am-4:00pm

Vermont 2-1-1, Burlington, VT, Phone: 211/<http://vermont211.org>

Vermont 2-1-1 is an confidential community support hotline. The trained operators at 2-1-1 are able to work with you in a time of need or crisis to connect you to any community support network in Vermont.

Mental Health Recovery Support Group (of National Alliance of Mental Illness, Vermont)

First Congregational Church, 880 Western Avenue, Brattleboro, VT, 800.639.6480.

NAMI Vermont offers free support groups for families and friends of individuals living with mental illness. The Brattleboro group meets the first Wednesday of every month, 6:30-8:00pm (during non-COVID times) at the First Congregational Church.

COMMUNICATION from the WIDER UCC COMMUNITY

Dear Friends, though Centre Church's cooperation with *Vermont Interfaith Action*, our minister, Scott Couper, signed the below correspondence in solidarity with other faith leaders around the state of Vermont and the country.

November 6, 2020

Dear Chief Justice Roberts –

As faith leaders from many traditions across our nation, we write to you out of deep concern for the health of our democracy and urge you to do everything in your power to protect the sacred right of all voters to have their vote counted and their voice heard in this election.

Our traditions all view human dignity as a core value. We recognize that a divine spark resides within everyone. No one is “more worthy” or “less worthy” in the eyes of our Creator. Each of us is entitled to the same rights and agency, the same opportunity to shape our own future and the future of our society.

Our religious beliefs support and reinforce fundamental civic values and democratic principles that we must all seek to uphold. Foremost is the right to vote, to know that our votes will be counted, and our voices heard.

In these polarized times, we are deeply concerned that our election’s legitimacy be upheld so that the results truly reflect the ‘will of the people.’ Any efforts to curtail voters’ participation will render the election results suspect, further destabilize our democratic institutions, and inflict another grave wound to our body politic. You may have a critical role to play in safeguarding our democracy in the weeks ahead.

We call on you and your fellow Justices, if a contested election outcome should emerge, to put the future of our democracy ahead of partisanship by allowing every vote to be counted before election results are finalized. We urge you to resist any pressures to exclude voters from having their ballots counted or to end vote-counting processes before every vote is counted.

Know that we will be holding you in prayer as you deliberate these momentous decisions.

Respectfully,

Rev. Michael-Ray Mathews, Deputy Director, Faith in Action

Rev. Dr. Katharine Rhodes Henderson, President, Auburn Seminary

Stosh Cotler, Chief Executive Officer, Bend the Arc Jewish Action

Rev. Jennifer Butler, Chief Executive Officer, Faith in Public Life

Rev. Adam Taylor, President-Elect and Acting President, Sojourners

From Council Chair, LYNN HERZOG

A major concern of the Council this month was the influence of the new COVID restrictions on the life of the church. As gatherings are limited to ten people or less, in-person services (including Christmas Eve) are regrettably suspended until further notice. Although working from home rather than in an office is recommended, we felt it was important to have someone available in the office, so Scott and Bruce will continue to work in their separate offices. We will all suffer from increased isolation because of restrictions on social occasions with non-family members. We discussed ways the church could reach out - bringing meals (four people immediately volunteered to deliver Thanksgiving dinner to anyone who wants it!), sending cards, making phone calls, 'drive-by' visits (which Scott will continue). It's important not just to keep others "in our thoughts and prayers", but to actively reach out in any way you can.

The Long Range Planning Team has had several meetings, including an orientation with Paul Nickerson. They are eager to get to work, and will be reporting to Council and *Centre Bells* of their progress in the future.

Financially, there was some good news, and some bad news. The good news is that the Paycheck Protection Program loan (\$31,700) was forgiven. The bad news is that we continue to spend more than we earn by \$10,000 last month (which is about average). This should remind everyone of the Stewardship campaign. It's time to send in your pledges for next year. The church depends on you. Please give generously, and give often!



From Music Director, MARY MILKEY-MAY

As we are now entering the season of Advent, it seems even more noticeable that we are unable to gather to sing the usual array of Christmas carols. The annual Messiah Sing will also not be happening this year. However, if you have interest in either listening to or participating in a Messiah Sing I share a link on the Friends of Centre Church Facebook Group. There is a virtual Messiah Sing being set up for Sunday, December 13 at 4:00pm in Worcester, MA, complete with orchestra and soloists. Here is an opportunity to still be part of a tradition, though not a live one in our sanctuary. If you have your own score, you can sing to the accompaniment provided. If you would like to borrow a score, please let me know as we do have some at the church.

Stay tuned for some special music happening in December. I hope to be able to fill some anthem slots with either singing or instruments that will be pre-recorded. Meanwhile, I hope everyone is staying safe and healthy.



FAITH FORMATION / CHRISTIAN ED

This fall has been extremely crazy in all of our lives. Before school had started, I talked with a few of the families and Kate. Hearing the parents concerns about the children's new schedules and their own, I decided that I would wait until October to start doing the Faith In Action work. While I was not reaching out to the children and giving them time to adjust to the new ways we have to live in, I did research on how churches are keeping in touch with their families and the children. I came up with different lessons that could be done at home and how to keep the younger and older children involved. Kate and I had messaged each other and gone over what we could do for the children. Then my life got crazy and I have to take a step back for now and I hope to return to it once things calm down. I wrote to the families letting them know that I will be taking a leave of absence from teaching and Faith In Action, but that I hope to return soon.

-Haley Marcil

MISSION & SERVICE

December is upon us, the 'Season of Giving'! How will we help those in need this season? We on Mission & Service are working trying to answer this question locally, nationally and internationally. One resolution that we have made is to have December's Second Sunday Offering go to **Luz del Mundo**, the scholarship fund for the children in Cabanitas, El Salvador. Each year we support the children's education by sending \$1,500. Usually we have a fund raiser for the bulk of these funds, but this year, as you know, is different. Maybe you've read on our Facebook page of the upgrades in the school building's plumbing and of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church's \$2,000 sent to support teachers' salaries. We now have the opportunity to support the children through the scholarship fund. We hope that you can participate.

Locally, we are in contact with the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and Nan Mann at the Brattleboro Centre for Children regarding our annual giving tree. We will update you through the church's *eNews* in the coming weeks. We hope to offer a way to give that will also be safe for all.

In addition to our Second Sunday Offering, Christmas Eve is usually when we replenish the **Samaritan Fund**. This fund is the church's discretionary fund which Rev. Couper can use for emergency situations. This year, for example, it housed a family for a night when no other beds were available. Our pastor's office is the first place that people come to as they enter our church. For Scott and people needing a little help, this small fund can provide what's needed in the moment.

Our last December offering, which will be Christmas Sunday, is **The Christmas Fund**, a 5 for 5 UCC offering.

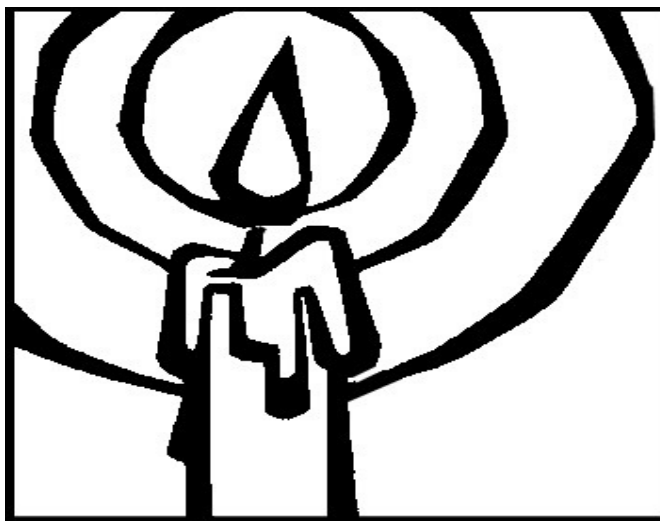
The Christmas Fund has been caring for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ for over 100 years, providing emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities and health premiums, and Christmas 'Thank You' gift checks each December to our lower-income retirees. Over the past nine months, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the emergency financial needs of many who serve the church have increased dramatically.

Within our state, there are pastors serving congregations much smaller than our own who serve without benefits such as healthcare. This fund helps those servants of the church who are facing a time of need.

On the national level, the UCC raised \$38,000 and then teamed up with New York based charity RIP Medical Debt, who buys debt for pennies on the dollar. "It's like Jesus feeding thousands of people from a few loaves of bread and two fish," said UCC Rev. Matt Fitzgerald. "We just watched \$38,000 become more than \$5 million." These funds were then used to buy \$5.3 million in medical debt for people living in the Chicago and then forgave it. The church estimates about six thousand families will benefit from the debt relief. Specific criteria were used. Qualifying debtors were those earning less than two times the federal poverty level; in financial hardship, with out-of-pocket expenses that are 5 percent or more of their annual income; or facing insolvency, with debts greater than assets. The UCC also announced it will launch a national fund raising effort to forgive medical debt for Giving Tuesday, December 3.

You can find this information on the UCC website.

We finish this report with a huge THANK YOU! Thank you for your generosity this year! You, the members and friends of Centre Church have given so much! We have helped bring a family together and welcomed Emilio's son to Brattleboro. We have supported **Loaves & Fishes** by delivering meals, cleaning up, and buying food to adding funds to Buildings & Grounds for the electric and gas bills. You have cooked and delivered meals to the overflow shelter. You have housed people through **The Help Fund** and the **Samaritan Fund**. And you have help educate children in El Salvador so that they may have a better life. Thank you for your part in all of this. There is much for which to be thankful!



DEACONS

Although our regular duties have been greatly reduced in the past several months due to limited in-person worship and canceling of events, we Deacons are still busy behind the scenes. We have been planning for Advent, and discussing with Reverend Scott possibilities for Christmas Eve services. At this writing we are anticipating offering a ZOOM service at 7:00pm. However, with COVID cases again on the rise, we are 'playing it by ear' and much is yet to be decided. Stay tuned!

Happily, we will again be adorning the sanctuary with wreaths, banners, and seasonal decor in anticipation of this most joyous time of year, albeit in a modified manner.

Under the circumstances, we will not be offering the opportunity to order Poinsettias for the chancel. Plants will be purchased and congregants will be invited to take a plant home or deliver one to a care facility or home-bound person. Please consider making a donation to offset the cost of the plants.

Reverend Scott has requested that liturgists introduce scripture readings with a brief exposition to provide historical/ theological context. He would also like Deacons and readers to take a more active and educational role in prayer. He is available to offer guidance and suggestions.

As the days darken, and this extraordinary year of loss, pain, and fear draws to a close, the hope and promise of Advent, of 'arrival', resonates more than ever. May the light of the stable be kindled in our hearts and prove a beacon in challenging days to come.

In Faith, Heidi Mario

PEOPLE

BIRTHDAYS

7 Debora Cope	24 Sen Pu
11 Olivia Brisson	Mary Ellen Bixby
12 Holly MacLean	25 Jesus of Nazareth
13 Alice Stockwell	31 Roger Brown
13 Isabelle Mann	
15 Sarah Gray	
17 Phyllis Hickok	
19 Patricia Austin	
22 Lee Moore	



NEW FRIENDS OF CENTRE CHURCH

Wendy Susan Collins

646 Bonnyvale Rd., Brattleboro, VT 05301
802.254.0272 / wscollins@comcast.net

NEW CONTACT INFORMATION

Gary Carrier—Dirigo Pines
c/o Allison Carrier Lucy
16 Page Place, Orono, ME 04473
207.944.0030

Robert Pu (TEMPORARY)
535 Tatum Drive, Alpharetta, GA 30022

Darlene LaPlante
70 Arbor Hill Commons, Unit 15
Brattleboro, VT 05301



A word of good cheer would be warmly received by members and friends of our church who are in nursing homes, assisted living centers, or are home-bound as of November 26.

Alta Barber
13223 N 3937 Dr., Bartlesville, OK 74003

Fran Burrows—Langdon Place
136A Arch St. #150, Keene, NH 03431

Gary Carrier—Dirigo Pines
c/o Allison Carrier Lucy
16 Page Place, Orono, ME 04473
207.944.0030

Sylvia Eaton
86 Brets Road, Brattleboro, VT 05301
802.254.6853

Wanda Godfrey—Vernon Hall
13 Greenway Dr., Vernon, VT 05354
802.254.2444

Phyllis Hickok
1520 Little Blue Stem Ct., Ames, IA 50014
515.337.1956

Bob & Dee Keller
153 Spruce St., Brattleboro, VT 05301
802.257.4588

Pat Neer—Thompson House
80 Maple St., Brattleboro, VT 05301

Karen Getty Peter—Pine Rock Manor
3 Denny Hill Rd., Warner, NH 03278

Jane Reed—Pine Heights
187 Oak Grove Ave., Brattleboro, VT 05301
802.257.0307

The Rev. Allen Vander Meulen
1 Harvest Circle #301, Lincoln, MA 01773
802.380.0735

*Please let the Administrator know
if we've missed someone.*

JOANNE M. MacLEAN—OBITUARY



Joanne M. MacLean 90, of Keene, NH and formerly of Chesterfield, NH, passed away peacefully at her home in Keene on November 8, 2020, surrounded in the love of her family.

She was born on January 15, 1930 in a small parsonage in Meservey, Iowa to Andrew and Lydia Henning. She joined her three sisters, Julia, Bertha and Juanita in that small town as preacher's kids. Their father's pastorate took them to churches in Defiance and Ackley, Iowa.

After high school, Joanne attended Westmar College in Le Mars, Iowa and the Iowa Methodist School of Nursing in Des Moines, Iowa. In 1952, Joanne married Leslie A. "Mac" MacLean, in Ames, Iowa, while Leslie was attending Iowa State College. The couple later moved to Des Moines, Iowa where Leslie took a position with Insurance Company of North America, transferring to the Kansas City, MO and the Milwaukee, Wisconsin offices after that. It was here that they welcomed their sons, Michael and James, and daughter, Ann into the family. The family later moved to Cherry Hill, NJ when Leslie took a position in the home offices of CIGNA, in Philadelphia.

Always wanting to be active in her community and to help others in need, Joanne worked as a registered nurse in various hospitals and doctors office, but it was in Cherry Hill that she was asked to act as a music contributor in a preschool setting. She took on some early childhood courses at Rutgers University and continued in preschool teaching until Leslie's retirement. It was at this time that the couple moved to Chesterfield, NH to make their retirement home.

Joanne found a place in the new Chesterfield Library where she continued working with preschool children. She also spent many years as co-director of Joan's Food Pantry; volunteering an hour of piano music each week at Cedarcrest Center for Children in Keene; and as a substitute pianist for the Sunday afternoon church services at Maplewood Nursing Home in Westmoreland, NH.

As a member of the Centre Congregational Church in Brattleboro, VT, Joanne held several position at the church including as substitute organist; and she also served on the Board that founded the Brattleboro Centre for Children.

Joanne was named the Mt. Pistareen Grange citizen of the year in 2006; and in April of 2014, she was honored by the Chesterfield Lions Club with a Granite State Fellow for exceptional service to NH citizens. Joanne was also a finalist, twice, in the Pillsbury bake-off.

She will be greatly missed by many in her community, but more so by her three children, Michael A. MacLean of Paulsboro, NJ, James MacLean and his wife, Serena, of Walpole, NH, Ann Senoyuit and her husband, Michael, of Lansdale, PA; her grandchildren, Caitlyn MacLean, Erin Rose MacLean, James D. MacLean and his wife, Brianna, Allison MacLean, Mary Senoyuit and her husband, Clark Smal, Sarah Cronin and her husband, Joseph, Michael Senoyuit, Catherine Senoyuit, Nicholas Senoyuit, Paul Senoyuit; her great-grandchildren, Riley Clark, Norah Clark, Zoey MacLean, Elayna Smal, Sophia Smal; her sister, Juanita Baker of Morton Grove, IL; and many nieces, nephews and extended family members. Joanne was predeceased by her husband of 59 years, Leslie, on May 9, 2011; and two sisters, Julia Carlander and Bertha Giere.

In lieu of flowers, for those who wish, donations may be made in Mrs. MacLean's memory to the Centre Congregational Church, 193 Main Street, Brattleboro, VT 05301.

The Fletcher Funeral Home of Keene is assisting the family with the arrangements. To offer online condolences to the family or to share special memories of Joanne, please visit www.fletcherfuneralhome.com.

DECEMBER 2020

**Holy Communion
*ZOOM Event

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1 11 ³⁰ Loaves & Fishes	2 8 ⁴⁵ Staff Meeting 7 ⁰⁰ 1st Wednesday *	3 10 ⁰⁰ UCC Devotional* 4 ⁰⁰ Sermon Discussion* 7 ⁰⁰ Worship Team	4 11 ³⁰ Loaves & Fishes	5
6 10 ⁰⁰ Worship ** ZOOM 12 ⁰⁰ Deacons meeting	7 4 ⁰⁰ BCC Board*	8 11 ³⁰ Loaves & Fishes	9 8 ⁴⁵ Staff Meeting 6 ⁰⁰ Mission & Service*	10 10 ⁰⁰ UCC Devotional* 4 ⁰⁰ Sermon Discussion* 7 ⁰⁰ Worship Team	11 CB DEADLINE 11 ³⁰ Loaves & Fishes	12
13 10 ⁰⁰ Worship ZOOM 4 ⁰⁰ WWAC event*	14	15 11 ³⁰ Loaves & Fishes 6 ³⁰ Long-Range Planning*	16 8 ⁴⁵ Staff Meeting 6 ⁰⁰ Church Council*	17 10 ⁰⁰ UCC Devotional* 4 ⁰⁰ Sermon Discussion* 5 ³⁰ Brattleboro Area Jewish Community 7 ⁰⁰ Worship Team	18 11 ³⁰ Loaves & Fishes	19
20 10 ⁰⁰ Worship ZOOM	21 1 ⁰⁰ Compassionate Brattleboro*	22 11 ³⁰ Loaves & Fishes	23 MAIL CB 8 ⁴⁵ Staff Meeting	24 CHRISTMAS EVE 10 ⁰⁰ UCC Devotional* 4 ⁰⁰ Sermon Discussion* 7 ⁰⁰ Worship ZOOM	25 CHRISTMAS DAY OFFICE CLOSED	26
27 10 ⁰⁰ Worship ZOOM	28	29 11 ³⁰ Loaves & Fishes	30 8 ⁴⁵ Staff Meeting	31 NEW YEARS EVE 10 ⁰⁰ UCC Devotional* 4 ⁰⁰ Sermon Discussion* 7 ⁰⁰ Worship Team		

SCOTT'S SERMONS can be accessed at the church website: www.centrechurchvermont.org -or-
facebook page: <http://www.centrechurchvermont.org/audio-video.html> -or-
https://www.facebook.com/pg/Centre-Congregational-Church-Brattleboro-VT-632678343519640/notes/?ref=page_internal -or-
From the website *Welcome* page, click *Audio & Video* in the top list (or click *More* or *Other* on the top right).



DECEMBER LECTIONARY TEXTS

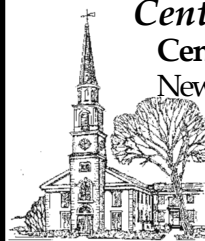
Sunday, December 6, 2nd Sunday of Advent
Isa 40:1-11; Ps 85:1-2, 8-13; 2 Peter 3:8-15a;
Mark 1:1-8

Sunday, December 13, 3rd Sunday of Advent
Isa 61:1-4, 8-11; Ps 126 or Luke 1:46b-55;
1 Thess 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28

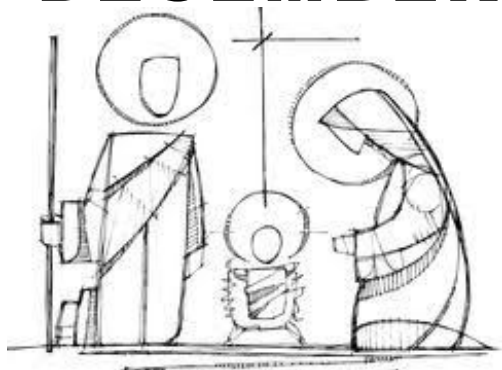
Sunday, December 20, 4th Sunday of Advent
2 Sam 7:1-11, 16; Luke 1:46b-55 or Ps 89:1-4, 19-26;
Rom 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38

Sunday, December 27, 1st Sunday after Christmas
Isa 61:10-62:3; Ps 148; Gal 4:4-7; Luke 2:22-40

Centre Bells is published monthly by
Centre Congregational Church, UCC
News items, articles, address changes, and
requests to be added or removed from
the *Centre Bells* mailing list should
be submitted to the church office:
802.254.4730 / admin@centrechurchvt.org



DECEMBER



2020

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**CENTRE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

193 Main Street Brattleboro, Vermont 05301
centrechurch@centrechurchvt.org

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

CENTRE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

193 Main Street, Brattleboro, VT 05301-2842

Office Hours: M – F / 8:30am–12:30pm

Church Office: 802.254.4730 / admin@centrechurchvt.org

Website: www.centrechurchvt.org

Facebook: [Centre Congregational Church-Brattleboro VT](https://www.facebook.com/Centre-Congregational-Church-Brattleboro-VT)

Instagram: @centrechurchvt

Current news/information in the larger UCC Community:

VT Conference: www.vtcucc.org / National: www.ucc.org

CHURCH STAFF AND LEADERSHIP

Minister and Teacher: The Rev. Dr. Scott Couper: 786.622.8473 (cell)
centrepastor@centrechurchvt.org

Music Director: Mary Milkey-May: music@centrechurchvt.org

Administrator: Bruce Landenberger: admin@centrechurchvt.org

Financial Secretary: Christine Yost: finance@centrechurchvt.org

Custodian: Emelio McCalla

Council Chair: Lynn Herzog

Treasurer: Anne Fecto

Clerk: Jenifer Ambler