

MINISTER'S COLUMN, Scott Couper

I would be a better minister if I could spend more time with our member Shiva Shankaran. His calm and wise disposition has much to teach me. Shiva recently lent me a book entitled *The Yoga of Jesus: Understanding the Hidden Teachings of the Gospels* by Paramahansa Yogananda. I have tried to take time during my vacation to bless myself with its insights. I would like to share one such insight with you.

*Miracles of wisdom to enlighten the mind are superior to miracles of physical healing and the subjugation of nature; and the even greater miracle is the healing of the root-cause of every form of suffering: delusive ignorance that obscures the unity of man's soul and God. That primordial forgetfulness is vanquished only by **Self-realization**, through the intuitive power by which the soul directly apprehends its own nature as individualized Spirit and perceives Spirit as the essence of everything.*¹

The concept of 'intuitive knowledge' intrigues me.

Throughout the month of March, we will continue to immerse ourselves in the season of Lent. Lent is perhaps the best season of the year (with Advent being a close second) during which we can best develop this 'intuitive knowledge' through this 'Self-realization' mentioned above.

Lent is a season of introspection – or Self-realization. What is self-evident about Self-realization is that it is done by one's self. Yes, the church can help. Yes, a labyrinth can enable us to focus. Yes, the minister can inspire. But the practice of self-realization has to be our own! *We* alone have to put the intention and 'work' in the process of Self-realization. No one can do it for us. Lent is a season wherein we interrogate *ourselves*. We evaluate ourselves. We are truthful with ourselves. We confess. We repent. We ask God to restore us. *We* do this mining: not our family, not our friends, not our church, and not our minister. We do it ourselves.

The Reverend Roger Brown also knows this. Roger also has much to teach us. Roger recently wrote to me in an email, "I see Lent as a time for personal discernment and spiritual practice".

It is my prayer that the COVID restrictions preventing us from administering the ashes this past Wednesday and the lack of 'Lenten' programming happening within the worship spaces of our church do not prevent you from drawing from *your own* spiritual well.

In this season of Lent, I am reminded of the story of Zacchaeus, the tax collector (Luke 19:1-10). If we re-read this familiar story, we realize the process by which Zacchaeus receives 'salvation' (and what 'salvation' is is another whole can of worms!). The story does not say the scriptures or prophesy (that is, the Law) enlightened Zacchaeus, for he knew the Law as he disobeyed it. The story does not say that a priest taught him (that is, the minister of the church). The story does not say a service or ceremony transformed him. The story does not say that Jesus even did anything for him! No, what enlightened Zacchaeus does not seem to be any of these 'externals'. The story states quite clearly that Zacchaeus himself came to the realization that he wronged others and he, by his own volition, volunteered to offer recompense. That is introspection. That is Self-realization. Jesus essentially declared that Zacchaeus' inner spiritual resources restored a right relationship between himself and God. May it true for us this Lenten season as well.

Be well. Love always in Christ, Scott

¹Paramahansa Yogananda, *The Yoga of Jesus: Understanding the Hidden Teachings of the Gospels* (Los Angeles, CA: Self-Realization Fellowship, 2019), 45.

CENTRE BELLS
March 2021
The newsletter of
Centre Congregational Church,
United Church of Christ





Council Chair, LYNN HERZOG

While doing some research for this month's Council meeting, I was surprised to discover that there are 18 different entities (6 Boards, 8 Committees, 3 Teams, and one Council) listed in the current CCC Directory, each with a distinct purpose. Granted, one is the Centre for Children Board, and one is the Loaves & Fishes Steering Committee, but that's still a lot of committees for one small church. Those of us who are on these committees often feel that it is the same dozen people on all of them, but there are actually 48 different people involved. Thank you all!!

I mention this because we have now created another committee: The Local Church Discernment Committee (the title comes from the UCC, not us—it seems more like a 'team' than a 'committee'—see below). Its purpose is to support Matt Deen as he follows the path to become an ordained minister in the UCC. The UCC has a three-page description of its functions, but I prefer Matt's description: "to meet regularly with me to review my spiritual journey, personal history, experience of church, and other questions about what a minister might face, and assess my progress along the way...". The committee tentatively consists of Margo Neale, Nan Mann, Priscilla Svec, and Marion Abell. I'm sure we are all grateful for Matt's inspired sermons and inspiring prayers, wish him well, and will support him in any way we can.

Here are some thoughts—mostly from Scott—on the difference between committees and teams:

- Committee: Formal, regimented, and intimidating, with agendas, meetings, roles, and responsibilities
- Team: working together toward a goal, with enthusiasm, cooperation, and fellowship.

If this is what people think, no wonder they don't want to be on a committee! But committees have a purpose, and they can be fun. Ask any of the 48 people who belong to one. If you're still skeptical, join a team.

From Music Director, MARY MILKEY-MAY

During February we enjoyed a rousing rendition of "Swinging with the Saints" during the service on the 14. Natalie Lewis, along with a few other UMASS folks, did a splendid job presenting the anthem. Thanks go to Ernie May for sharing his soloists with us! And for those of you who happen to look at the titles of the Preludes and Postludes, you may have noticed "Romanza" was also on the 14, Valentines Day! That was purposeful...it means "romance"!

We are now in Lent and have already enjoyed the instrumental talents of Alison Hale, Holly Kennedy and Matt Kennedy during the last two Sundays in February. Stay tuned for some vocalists who will also be providing special anthems each week during this season.

Our choir members have been invited to participate in a Virtual Sing hosted by Becky Graber. Becky is the director of the Brattleboro Women's Chorus. She is also Director of Music at the UCC church in Londonderry. Kathy Bullock will be leading this workshop on March 7 from 4:00-5:15pm as a fun time for area UCC church singers to gather (remotely). She is highly recommended by all who know her and have sung with her. Several choir folks from Centre Church will be attending, including me. Please let me know if you have an interest in participating. You do not have to be a choir member to participate.





DEACONS

This month, as we are aware, will mark one full year since we were last able to regularly gather in our sanctuary for worship, mingle in the Fireside Room for chat and treats at fellowship time, sit together at board meetings, and share our beautiful edifice with the community for a concert or lecture. A grim anniversary, harder still coming at a time of year that for many is already dark, frigid, isolating, and bleak.

But as I write, a fresh soft blanket of snow sparkles under a cerulean sky. Bird feeders outside my window bustle with a flurry of winged visitors large and small. Busy squirrels tunnel for dropped seed, romp and chase one another through the cream-frosted trees. The whitened earth is woven with the trails of our wild neighbors, manifesting presence, even if paw, claw and hoof prints are the sole evidence of their expeditions. Life, beauty, and endurance prevail.

Although our sanctuary is hushed for now, Centre Church remains a hub of activity. Hallways and outdoor spaces ring with the sweet music of children's voices. Tuesdays and Fridays, tantalizing aromas announce the tireless work of the faithful crew of Loaves & Fishes in Memorial Hall, ever answering the call to feed God's lambs. A few of us spent a convivial Saturday afternoon in the Fireside Room, masked and distanced, creating handmade Valentines to send to church friends (we wished we could have made and sent hundreds, and are sorry if we missed you!), delighted to be able to work and laugh together again.

On February 12, in the icy heart of winter, love bloomed in our little chapel as our minister, Scott, exchanged vows with his beautiful bride Stephanie, joyously joining their families. What more fitting emblem of faith and confidence in God's promise?

May we ever keep the promise of new beginnings in our hearts.

In faith, Heidi Mario

LONG-RANGE PLANNING TEAM

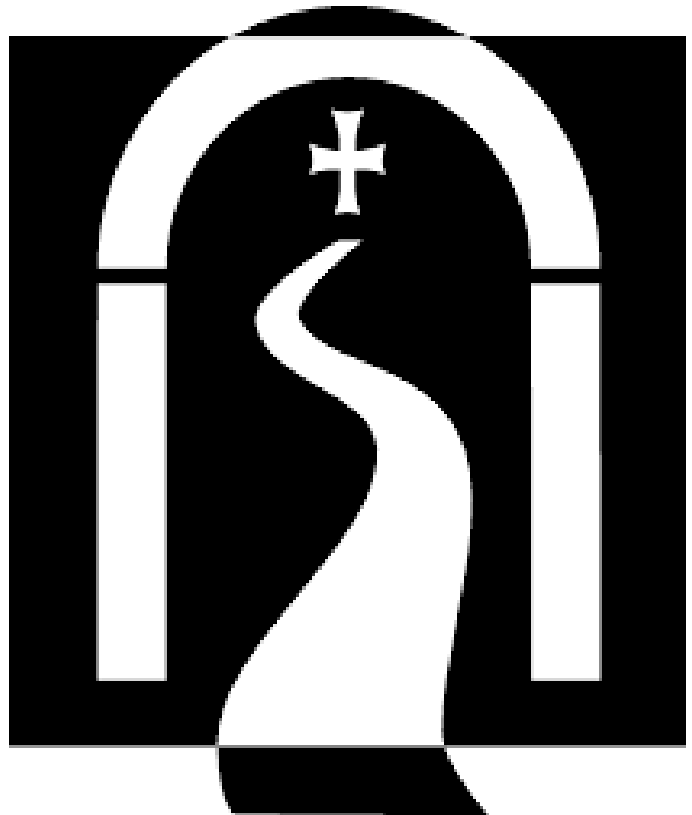
During the week of February 7–12 the Long-Range Planning Team (LRPT) held a series of ZOOM meetings with members and friends of the church to discuss the survey and attendance questionnaire that were made available in electronic form to all members and friends. Approximately 30 members and friends of the church participated in these discussions moderated by members of the LRPT. In addition, several individuals who were not able to participate in the ZOOM meetings submitted written responses to the survey and attendance questionnaire. We will be discussing the information gleaned from these meetings and written submissions at our next meeting with The Rev. Paul Nickerson on February 23 and plan to summarize our findings in both written and digital format so that it will be readily accessible to all interested parties.

In March we will begin asking ourselves two very important questions:

- Why do we exist as a church?
- What is our vision?

In conjunction with this work, Scott's up-coming Lenten sermon series (February 21 – March 28) is entitled "Biblical Optometry: Discerning our Church's 'Corrective Vision'".

-Robert Pu, *Chair*



MISSION & SERVICE

Thank you to all who continue to serve Centre Church in so many ways! Our 'vigil' in front of our church was shared by many. People walking and driving by enjoyed the bright hearts posted in the hedges. Others explored the labyrinth by day and night. The vigil was to honor the lives lost and the lives who work each day to keep us healthy and safe during this COVID pandemic. Special thanks to Margo Neale who took the time to skillfully cut all the hearts and post them in the hedges and to Jack and Mary Ellen Bixby for their leadership in the labyrinth project. Signs were designed, purchased, and posted by Mary Ellen. Jack not only wrote a description of the meaning of our labyrinth, his shovel was also quick to create the curves of the simple labyrinth. Peter Abell smoothed the pathway with the snow-blower. Marion Abel cut hearts that could be held as one walked the labyrinth. For one week, each night that the weather allowed, Dennis Newman, Priscilla Svec, Bonnie Girvan, and Margo Neale made sure that the candles were lit and blown out. Scott Davenport helped keep the pathways up when the snow arrived late in the week. Ron Svec helped to create and transport the ice candle holders and purchased the candles that lit the pathways of the labyrinth. Bruce helped publicize the project, as did Kevin Radder of the Brattleboro Reformer. And, thank you to all who came to walk and meditate along the labyrinth. It was a joy to see it used!

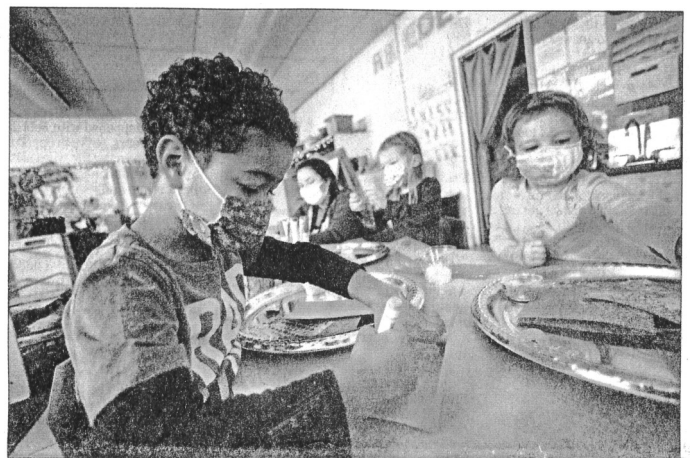
Second Sunday Offerings in 2021 have been Groundworks in January, totaling \$300, and 'Mission Possible' for our church in February, with the total to be reported in the next *Centre Bells*. Our March Second Sunday offering will be *One Great Hour of Sharing*. This UCC offering is our first of the 5 for 5 offerings in which we participate through Centre Church. One Great Hour of Sharing® is one of five special mission offerings of the United Church of Christ. This Lenten Offering supports the disaster, refugee, and development ministries of the United Church of Christ within Wider Church Ministries. Thank you for your donations.

We also want to thank one Centre Church donor who has used this time, and the extra funds that have come via the COVID relief, to support *The Help Fund* through Centre Church. Many in our community have needed these funds to pay rent, buy food, etc. There are also many others who find themselves receiving federal funds that they do not need. Mission & Service would like to invite you to consider a donation, as this donor did. Let us know if you have questions. As with Jesus, let us live and give by example.



BRATTLEBORO CENTRE FOR CHILDREN

I hope some of you saw *The Reformer* on Valentine's Day weekend. BCC was featured because our pre-school class participated in a wonderful Valentine's Day project with *Senior Solutions* and *Meals on Wheels*. We were contacted by the Council on Aging for Southern Vermont and asked if our children would make Valentine cards for senior citizens in the Brattleboro area who participate in Meals on Wheels and don't have family nearby to cheer them up. We said "yes" enthusiastically. The children in our pre-school (ages 3 to 5 years old) made beautiful cards of pink, red, and purple with glitter and stickers and stamps. Heart shapes abounded! The children knew that these cards were going to people they don't know, but who might need a reason to smile. Looking at the pile of gorgeous cards as we packed them up, we are certain that smiles will abound as well. *The Reformer* sent a photographer and a reporter and the children (who had releases from their parents for their photos to be taken and published) made cards and answered questions. It was a wonderful project and BCC is proud to have these youngest citizens do such a wonderful thing for some of the oldest members of our town. And now, we look forward to spring!



MESSAGE FROM THE WIDER CHURCH

*A pear seed grows up into a pear tree,
a nut seed grows up into a nut tree—
but a seed of God grows into God, to God.
~ Meister Eckhart*

Lent is an invitation to reflect on our faith experience, a time to delve more deeply into the spiritual meaning of our lives. We study the life and ministry of Jesus for clues about the will of God and the work of the Spirit in the world. We seek fresh insight into the basic patterns of the Christian life – prayer, worship, reading Scripture, and giving ourselves as servants of Christ.

During this 40-day period, we begin with ashes and commit to a discipline that we believe will ultimately be resurrecting! It may involve fasting from certain foods or activities. But it will certainly involve feasting as we gather on the Sabbath and receive the bread and cup of communion with Christ as nourishment for this spiritual journey.

We have an opportunity in these forty days to renew the commitment of our way to Christ. This is our chance to put our faith into practice in new ways. This is a time set aside for us to “grow into God, to God.”

A short piece from the curriculum *The Whole People of God* provides an opening for us to choose how we will use this holy season. We are invited to...

Fast from *pessimism*, and feast on *optimism*.

Fast from *criticism*, and feast on *praise*.

Fast from *self-pity*, and feast on *joy*.

Fast from *bitterness*, and feast on *forgiveness*.

Fast from *idle gossip*, and feast on *purposeful silence*.

Fast from *jealousy*, and feast on *love*.

Fast from *discouragement*, and feast on *appreciation*.

Fast from *complaining*, and feast on *hope*.

Fast from *selfishness*, and feast on *service*.

Fast from *fear*, and feast on *faith*.

Fast from *anger*, and feast on *patience*.

Fast from *self-concern*, and feast on *compassion for others*.

Fast from *discontent*, and feast on *gratitude*.

Fasting and feasting – not just for the experience, but for the same reasons Jesus was led into the wilderness by the Spirit following his baptism by John. Jesus was preparing for the saving mission of a loving God – the mission of restoring creation, the human family, the sick, the lonely and isolated, the marginalized and vulnerable, back into the truth of who they are, beloved ones made in God’s own image!

Just as Jesus was baptized and given a blessing, and then sent into the wilderness to contemplate that blessing, so it is for us. You and I – Christ’s body on earth – have a mission, to share God’s gracious love and resurrecting hope in every possible way!

The season of Lent calls us to choose: Choose life! Choose grace! Choose compassion! Choose justice! Choose blessing! In the desert experience of Lent, may God grant us to the grace to grow in wisdom and in love. In the wilderness of this holy season, may God lead us along the resurrection road to a place called hope.

What is your commitment this Lent? What do you choose to do or not do as a way to move toward the Center of this human adventure where we meet God?

-Words (c) 2013 Mark Lloyd Richardson

MEMBER CARE

2020-2021 Outreach to Members, Friends and the Community

Our church made great efforts to reach out to those homebound or living alone and feeling isolated during the fall and winter of 2020 and 2021. In November, several members/friends were contacted to see if they would like a Thanksgiving meal. The names were compiled and shared among members who were willing to provide Thanksgiving meals. Many meals were delivered by our minister, Scott. During the Christmas season Heidi Mario (a very thoughtful, artistic, and creative member) suggested making small tabletop greenery arrangements. Greens and holly were donated by members. Heidi created the decorations and Carlene McCarty organized members to make cookies to accompany the greens. Again, many were delivered by Scott and others in the church. These were very well received! A very large lit tree was erected on the front lawn during Christmas and Epiphany. Heidi again made the wonderful suggestion that we make and send handmade Valentines to those isolated as well as to several new friends who have been attending our ZOOM services. Early in February, a few of us met to create Valentines, go through the directory, and reach out to those new people. They were mailed the week before Valentines Day. I would also add that this opportunity was a happy and uplifting time for the people involved in the activity, as we were able to have socially distant and masked fellowship with those we had not seen in person in a very long time. There are plans to do the same for Easter cards. Lastly, the lit Labyrinth created on the lawn for those walking by to meditate on and enjoy was a great success (see Mission & Service).

-Karen Rydant, Member Care and Long-Range Planning Team (LRPT)



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 housebound as of February 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

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 Keller

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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.

PEOPLE

NEW CENTRE CHURCH MEMBERS

Ann Reed (reactivated)

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Brattleboro, VT 05301

802.246.7609

Wendy Susan Collins (transfer)

646 Bonnyvale Rd.

Brattleboro, VT 05301

802.254.0276 / wscollins@comcast.net

MARCH 2021

*ZOOM events
**Holy Communion

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1 4 ⁰⁰ BCC Board	2 11 ³⁰ Loaves & Fishes	3 8 ⁴⁵ Staff Meeting 7 ⁰⁰ First Wednesday	4 10 ⁰⁰ UCC Devotional* 4 ⁰⁰ Sermon discussion* 7 ⁰⁰ Worship Team	5 11 ³⁰ Loaves & Fishes	6
7 10 ⁰⁰ Worship zoom 12 ⁰⁰ Deacons' meeting	8	9 11 ³⁰ Loaves & Fishes	10 8 ⁴⁵ Staff Meeting 6 ⁰⁰ Mission & Service	11 10 ⁰⁰ UCC Devotional* 4 ⁰⁰ Sermon discussion* 7 ⁰⁰ Worship Team	12 CB DEADLINE 11 ³⁰ Loaves & Fishes	13
14 Daylight Savings Time begins 10 ⁰⁰ Worship zoom	15 1 ⁰⁰ Compassionate Brattleboro	16 11 ³⁰ Loaves & Fishes	17 St. Patrick's Day 8 ⁴⁵ Staff Meeting 6 ⁰⁰ Church Council	18 10 ⁰⁰ UCC Devotional* 4 ⁰⁰ Sermon discussion* 7 ⁰⁰ Worship Team	19 11 ³⁰ Loaves & Fishes	20
21 10 ⁰⁰ Worship zoom	22	23 11 ³⁰ Loaves & Fishes	24 MAIL CB 8 ⁴⁵ Staff Meeting	25 10 ⁰⁰ UCC Devotional* 4 ⁰⁰ Sermon discussion* 7 ⁰⁰ Worship Team	26 11 ³⁰ Loaves & Fishes	27
28 10 ⁰⁰ Worship zoom	29	30 11 ³⁰ Loaves & Fishes	31 8 ⁴⁵ Staff Meeting			

SCOTT'S / MATT'S SERMONS can be accessed at the church website: www.centrechurhvermont.org -or- facebook page: <http://www.centrechurhvermont.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).

NEW FRIENDS OF CENTRE CHURCH

Stephanie Couper,
Ana and Lydia Ducharme
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Attleboro, MA 02703
401.374.0131 / stephasja@yahoo.com

Daniel Guerra
111 High St. #6
Brattleboro, VT 05301
209.499.7454 / caspianguerra@gmail.com

MARCH LECTIONARY TEXTS

Sunday, March 7, 3rd Sunday in Lent
Ex 20:1-17; Ps 19; 1 Cor 1:18-25; Jn 2:13-22

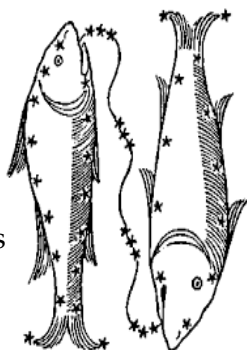
Sunday, March 14, 4th Sunday in Lent
Num 21:4-9; Ps 107:1-3, 17-22; Eph 2:1-10; Jn 3:14-21

Sunday, March 21, 5th Sunday in Lent
Jer 31:31-34; Ps 51:1-12 or Ps 119:9-16; Heb 5:5-10;
Jn 12:20-33

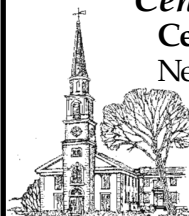
Sunday, March 28, 6th Sunday in Lent / Palm Sunday
(Liturgy of the Palms) Ps 118:1-2, 19-29; Mk 11:1-11
or Jn 12:12-16
(Liturgy of the Passion) Isa 50:4-9a; Ps 31:9-16;
Phil 2:5-11; Mk 14:1-15:47 or Mk 15:1-39, (40-47)

BIRTHDAYS

- 2 Priscilla Svec
- 5 Emma Rueter
- 6 Emmet Healey
- 7 Diane Bassett
- 18 Haley Marcil
- 20 Katherine Fecto
- 22 Wendy Susan Collins
Matt Kennedy
- 26 Addison Minott
- 27 Marilyn Young



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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@centrechurhvt.org

MARCH



2021

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BRATTLEBORO, VT 05301

**CENTRE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

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centrechurch@centrechurchvt.org

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

CENTRE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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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

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Clerk: Jenifer Ambler