

Lenten Spiritual Practices

First Congregational Church of Hanover

United Church of Christ

Judaism is a religion of time aiming at the sanctification of time. Unlike the space-minded man to whom time is unvaried, iterative, homogeneous, to whom all hours are alike, quality-less, empty shells, the Bible senses the diversified character of time. There are no two hours alike. Every hour is unique and the only one given at the moment, exclusive and endlessly precious. Judaism teaches us to be attached to holiness in time, to be attached to sacred events, to learn how to consecrate sanctuaries that emerge from the magnificent stream of a year. Excerpt from Sabbath by Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel.

As descendants deeply rooted in the tradition of Sabbath, our tradition has always offered seasons of holy time to reconnect with God and sacred stillness to realign or reorient our lives. Lent is one of the most fundamental of those times and is the foundation of our HOPE. It is a season of preparation for Holy Week and Easter, a 40-day period from February 25 (Ash Wednesday) until April 12 (Easter).

Lent has long been a season of sacrifice where people 'give up something' to help them focus on prayer and spirituality, but many people have come to prefer the sacrifice of taking on additional disciplines during the 40 days. Spiritual practices are meant to help us deepen our relationship with God and are drawn from the collective wisdom of centuries of men and women of faith who have walked a journey with God and passed along the road signs and potholes for us. At their heart they create the fertile ground in which the Fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5) may bloom and ripen in our souls, our relationships, our perspectives and our compassion. These Fruits will be a theme of worship throughout Lent: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Goodness, Kindness, Faithfulness, Generosity and Self-Control. They are the means to life and light. From these, HOPE springs forth.

This year we are asking all boards and committees to suspend their regular meetings during Lent so that the entire church can focus on prayer and spiritual practice as explained in the following pages.

1. **PRAYER PRACTICE - Household Prayer:** During the 40 days of Lent, Rev. Don and Rev. Meg will return to our Household Prayer practice. Each week we will send letters to a set of households on our church list. We'll let them know that we

will be intentionally focusing on their family the following week. *After you receive a letter, please phone, email, or write to us about any concerns that you want us to lift up in prayer.*

2. **PRAYER PRACTICE - Church prayer calendar:** Our prayer is that we can fill our prayer calendar with people willing to hold our church in prayer for each day of the month. While many people hold the church regularly in prayer, we would like to see the calendar filled, especially during Lent, so that our church and church family are blanketed in prayer every day. We ask you to consider a gift of time on one day of 15 minutes to an hour. *Sign up in the vestry for 15 minutes of prayer for our church on one day during Lent.*

3. **PRAYER PRACTICE - Confirmation Prayer Guardians:** Everyone interested will be given the name of one of our Confirmation members to hold in prayer. You can give notes to Rev. Don who will deliver them to the students. In return, the members of the Confirmation Class will be invited to give prayer requests that will be passed on to their guardians. Guardians will be welcome to share a little of their faith and their journey with God if they wish. The identity of the Prayer Guardians will not be revealed until Confirmation Sunday May 17. *Contact Rev. Don to sign up, then pray for your Confirmation during Lent and beyond, through Confirmation Sunday.*

4. CONVERSATIONAL PRACTICES

- **Faith and Finance – Money Matters** Pam Jolly will return to our church to help us reflect on that intersection of faith and finance. Next to

Listen + Study = Fruit and Discernment

God wants the combination of his steady, constant calling and warm, personal counsel in Scripture to come to characterize us, keeping us alert for whatever he will do next . Romans 15:4 (The Message)

prayer and the Kingdom of God it is the topic that Jesus and the Bible address most often. It is also an intensified topic as we move through these difficult economic times. Pam has a background in banking and investment. She also worked with FEMA to create an economic plan for the recovery of New Orleans. Pam is currently studying for ministry at Boston University School of Theology. She will bring her practical perspective, insight and suggestions on how to manage our budgets in these hard times. More deeply she will help us explore what money means to us in the context of our faith.

- **Faith and History** – *Where did the other Gospels come from?* Simon Lee, Assistant Professor of New Testament studies at Andover Newton Theological School, will give us insight into the Non-Canonical gospels. These are early church documents about the life and teachings of Jesus that did not get included in the Bible as we know it. We'll find out more about what they are and why they were not considered authoritative enough for the canon of scripture that we know as our Bible. *Join one or any of the Monday Faith Conversations on Monday evenings at 7:30 pm. Money Matters conversations will be March 2, 9 and 15. Faith & History conversations will be March 30.*

5. **PRAYER PRACTICE - Secret Prayer Partners:** All are invited to be a part of this Lenten intercessory prayer ministry; one of commitment to pray daily for your prayer partner; to be sensitive to and secretly communicate with him or her throughout the year and be supportive during difficult personal times or family crisis. Imagine the possibilities in our relationships here at the church if we gave ourselves to this spiritual practice. Prior to Lent Rev. Meg will assign a prayer partner to all interested participants. Personal information is provided, such as the person's birthday, anniversary, and the

names of his/her family members, if applicable. The commitment is to pray for this partner every day during Lent. At the end of the season a brief get-together will be held, the 'secret partners' are revealed. Rev. Meg will coordinate prayer partners so that if a special need arises that needs very focused prayer she can contact your partner to let him or her know. This experience is deeply spiritual and a means to focus your prayer on "the other." *There are forms in the vestry to complete and return to Rev. Meg, or you may e-mail her at pclapp@comcast.net. Pray for your Secret Prayer Partner from February 25, Ash Wednesday, through April 12, Easter, and give prayer needs to Rev. Meg to give to your prayer partner.*

6. **PRAYER PRACTICE - Morning Prayer:** All are invited to join in prayer before running off to work or jumping into a day of activity. We will gather Tuesday mornings from March 2– April 7 at 7 am in the church for prayer, reflection and communion. Rather than a cup of coffee the focus of the prayer time will be "The cup of my life," a container of God's presence, a vessel of loving energy, the boundaries of my cup and thirsting for filling. *Every time you listen with great attentiveness to the voice that calls you the Beloved, you will discover with in yourself a desire to hear that voice longer and more deeply,* Henri Nouwen. *Join Rev. Meg and other church members to pray on Tuesday mornings at 7 am from March 2 through April 7.*

7. **SPIRITUAL PRACTICE OF DISCERNMENT.** The book conversation about *Half Time* by Bob Buford only whet our appetites to spend more time wrestling with this book. The author shared his process of spiritual discernment that helped to change and refocus his life values and work. As you can imagine his introspective look took him many years and

we found ourselves wanting to dive deeper into a discussion than time permitted. You are invited to a discussion on Thursday evenings to explore the Spiritual Practice of discernment in our lives. Have you been thinking it is time for a change? Are you trying to decide what you want to be when you grow up? What are my gifts? What is my call? What is my direction and am I focused on God? We will explore these questions and whatever else may be on your heart. We are all placed here with a unique set of gifts and talents that need to be used in answer to God's call. *Join Rev. Meg discuss Spiritual Gifts and Discernment on Thursday evenings at 7:30 from February 26-April 2.*

8. **BIBLE STUDY PRACTICE - Daily Book Readings:** The church staff has compiled a list of the daily devotional books for Lent which have had the most impact on us. During the last few weeks of February, these books will be available for purchase at coffee hour. You can look them over and see which one might most fit your spirit for at-home devotions each day of Lent. Books include *One Minute Prayers for Men, One Minute Prayers for Women, Lent and Easter Wisdom* from Thomas Merton, *Living the Days of Lent 2009: Insights from the Gospels, Advent & Lent Activities for Children*. Heritage House in Brockton has supplied the books for the book display; any unused books are returned at no charge and if you want a book that is out of stock, we can order it. This is not a fund raiser for the church, but a convenient way to purchase Lenten books. Rev. Don also recommends *A Season for the Spirit* by Martin L. Smith that can be purchased at Amazon.com. *Decide what Lenten devotional you'd like to commit to read each day in Lent.*
9. **PRAYER PRACTICE - Online Options:** Our United Church of Christ offers several daily options for prayer and reflection through its website and by email. You can look these over or sign up at the these web links: www.ucc.org/worship/calendar/ (our daily Mission Moment), www.i.ucc.org (next Sunday's Bible Readings with reflections and questions) <http://i.ucc.org/FeedYourSpirit/> (sign up for daily email devotions and reflections). *Sign up to receive one or more daily Lenten e-devotions.*
10. **PRAYER PRACTICE - Labyrinth options:** *Pray and walk the outdoor Labyrinth during Lent at anytime, or join us for Firelight Walks on Wednesdays at 7:30.*
 - Wednesday evenings we will begin our Firelight Walks again with a different devotional reflection each week.
 - On March 5 at 7 pm at the indoor Labyrinth Brita Gill-Austern, Austin Giles Professor of Psychology and Pastoral Care at Andover Newton Theological School, will return for an additional presentation on Recovering Christian Spiritual Practices. Brita's last presentation was immensely well received and people have been asking when she could return. The labyrinth will be available from 6-9 pm.
11. **HOLY WEEK WORSHIP:** *Experience the Passion fully by worshipping and participating in all of the Holy Week events at our church.*
 - **Maundy Thursday Service of Tenebrae:** This is one of the most moving and significant services of our year. We reenact the story of Jesus arrest and trial with a Service of Shadows diminishing the light as his death approaches. The service includes communion and a special time with our 6th grade class. Please join us on April 9 at 7:30 pm.
 - **Good Friday Dinner:** Beginning at noon on Good Friday, April 10, we will open our indoor labyrinth with prayers marking the time that the crucifixion began. At 6 pm we will offer a dinner where everyone is welcome. Following the dinner there will be special music played on bass by John Wall to set a reflective tone as people walk the Labyrinth or sit and contemplate.
 - **Holy Saturday Vigil:** This ancient church tradition will be offered in the form of a reflection booklet for those who want to stop by to pray and/or walk the Labyrinth (indoors or out) all day on Saturday, April 11, until sunset.
12. **BRING FAITH HOME:** Part of our spiritual discipline is tending the Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5). It will be woven into the themes of our worship. Lenten Practice includes the sacrifice of giving things up and taking things on. It is not

only about developing ourselves, but caring for our world as well. Each week in Lent you can bring your faith home to church. We have several ongoing mission efforts in the vestry. They include:

- **Bring redeemable cans to church.** We use the proceeds towards the purchase of a Heifer ark.
- **Bring empty printer ink cartridges.** The proceeds go to charity.
- **Bring canned goods and dry goods** for the food pantry.
- **Bring in items for the Ditty Bags** for Seafarers Friends: Band Aids, Cologne, Deodorant, Shaving Cream, Razors, Tooth paste , Tooth brushes, Dental Floss, Nail Clippers, Shaving Lotion, First Aid Kits, Kleenex, Hair Brushes, Nail Files, Knit Hats, Gloves, Socks, Shoelaces, Shoe Polish, Scarves, Socks, Mending Kits, Pens/ Pencils, Playing Cards, Postcards , Memo Pads.
- **Bring in heath and beauty aids for Main-Spring.** Supplies needed are shampoo and conditioner, soap, toothpaste and toothbrushes, towels and washcloths, feminine products and deodorant.
- **Bring in new or used children's pajamas for Cradles to Crayons.** Lend a helping hand to a child with the gift of warm pajamas.
- **Bring in supplies for Hygiene Kits.** The United Church of Christ working with Church World Service provides immediate practical assistance in times of disaster in our country and around the world. Basic essentials are some of the things most needed. In the face of natural disasters, violence, or grinding poverty, Hygiene Kits can mean the difference

between sickness and health for struggling families. You can help us by bringing the following items to church:

- ⇒ One hand towel measuring approximately 16" x 28" (no fingertip or bath towels)
 - ⇒ One washcloth
 - ⇒ One wide-tooth comb
 - ⇒ One nail clipper (no metal files or emery boards)
 - ⇒ One bar of soap (bath size in wrapper)
 - ⇒ One toothbrush (in original packaging)
 - ⇒ Six Band-Aids
- **Fast on Maundy Thursday.** Many folks choose to forgo meals on Maundy Thursday, participating in the ancient Christian Spiritual practice of fasting. They bring the money they would have spent on food that day to the evening worship. All the donations will be given to the Hanover Food Pantry
 - **Good Friday Walk.** Participate in or give a donation to the Good Friday Walk. Signup forms will be available in the Vestry to join the walk or sponsor a walker.
 - **Donate to One Great Hour of Sharing.** Part of our Church's Wider Mission is the special mission offering of the United Church of Christ that carries God's message of love and hope to people in more than eighty countries. OGHS supports domestic and international ministries for disaster preparedness and response. Our OGHS offering will be received at church throughout the month of March.

Choose one, any or all of these ways to "Bring Faith Home" during Lent. Giving from the heart is what Good Friday is all about, and these giving opportunities offer people of varying means to impact a life this Lenten season.

Prayer Helps-Prayer Works

A handout will be available in the Vestry to help you with some insight, support and ideas for ways to pray. These can be used in conjunction with many of our Lenten prayer practices from church prayer, to personal prayer, to prayer partners, to Confirmation guardians. Recognizing that prayer takes many forms and people have different styles the Prayer Helps will include practices from scripture reflection to prayer in motion to visualization to centering meditation and more.

Lenten Calendar At-A-Glance

February 25, Ash Wednesday

- 6 pm Stone Soup Supper at Riley Hall
- 7:30 pm Worship
- Begin praying for Secret Prayer Partner through Easter, April 12
- Begin daily Lenten devotion through Easter, April 12

Thursdays in February 26-April 2 - *Halftime* book discussion on Thursday evenings at 7:30 in Vestry.

March 2, 9 and 15 - Money Matters conversations in Vestry.

Wednesdays in March 4-April 8 - Join us at the outdoor Labyrinth on Wednesday evenings in Lent for a Firelight Walk with a different devotional reflection each week.

March 5 at 7 pm - *Recovering Christian Spiritual Practices* presentation. The labyrinth will be available from 6-9 pm.

Tuesdays in March 2 through April 7 - Morning prayer at church on Tuesdays at 7 am.

March 30 - Faith & History conversations in Vestry.

April 9, Maundy Thursday

- Tenebrae service at 7:30 pm
- Fast today and donate to the Food Banks

April 10, Good Friday

- Indoor labyrinth begins at noon
- 6 pm dinner; everyone is welcome
- Good Friday Walk

April 11, Holy Saturday Vigil - Pray and/or walk the Labyrinth (indoors or out) all day until sunset.

April 12, Easter Sunday Worship

- Sunrise service at 6 am
- Family service at 8:30 am
- Traditional service at 10 am

OUR MISSION

The mission of the First Congregational Church of Hanover, United Church of Christ, is to make the love of God and the God of love known as both continue to be revealed to us. We welcome all people into the full life and ministry of our church regardless of their age, gender, race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, class or economic standing, because we believe that no matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here.

We gather people together in God's love that grounds us in a caring community and transforms our lives of faith. We send people out to make a difference in the world through compassion and justice.

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