

ON THE COMMON

February

From the Pastor's Desk...

BY REV. SEAN AMATO

"The Kingdom"

At last month's Sensory Friendly Service, one of our attendees came up to me and asked an important question about faith and the world. This particular attendee tends to ask excellent, detailed questions relating to Christianity - and this query, poignant and eerily mature, stuck with me. They asked: "So what is the Kingdom of Heaven?"

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus is the first to use this phrase: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (3:2). He uses it again a chapter later as our scripture begins to link the work of Jesus to the world he's attempting to create: a world in which "the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region, in the shadow of death, light has dawned" (4:16). Jesus seems to be telling us that the Kingdom of Heaven isn't just a place, but a process: one in which Christians recognize the world's darkness, observe the possibility of what 'could be,' and work toward bringing light unto the world. It's clear to me, too, that this is not a solo effort: the "Kingdom of Heaven" contains multitudes, and that means it's (by necessity) a group effort.

Drawing from Jesus's words and theology, I identify the Kingdom of Heaven as two separate but related concepts. It represents both a spiritual community, a group of people attempting to usher in light through faith, and a Christian goal - a real-world entity reigned over by humans serving God, resembling Heaven in its beneficence, openness, and

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Joseph Godfrey, Music Director
Jill Boday, Handbell Choir
Patricia Renaud, Organist
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From the Pastor's Desk ... (Cont.)

love of the Lord. But as every church comes to find out, "building up the Kingdom" can be a difficult thing in our partisan and individualistic world.

As every Christian has their own perspective on Heaven, we shouldn't be too surprised when Christians clash while trying to make each of those Heavens come true!

Friends, we'll soon be arriving at our Annual Meeting - a chance where, to be frank, you have the rare opportunity to work together and help define "the Kingdom of Heaven" by our standards - not just yours, but our shared vision of Heaven. This means sharing our viewpoints, and caring about those of others; this means growing and learning with one another, coming to terms with the differences in our Heavens before we try and make them. In order to achieve the Christian goal that is the "Kingdom of Heaven," I believe that we have to make Heaven a real thing between each other before such a fire can spread to the rest of the world. What is Heaven to you, Slatersville Congregational Church? Let's build it.

God, bless this special church; grant us discernment as we walk the bounteous path before us. Give us ears to listen to one another, and eyes to see the world outside of church; grant us soft hearts, too, so that we set aside our human failings to create something divine. Almighty Lord, help set our souls on Your Kingdom; help us build a community that stands the test of time, and enlightens our world. Amen.

- Pastor Sean



Missions Moment

BY ALISON PEIRCE

As the Missions Committee embarked on a new year, it seemed fitting that one of our first donations was to New Beginnings of Woonsocket. New Beginnings is a non-profit organization that serves more than 300 people hot, hearty, and home-cooked meals four days a week in the greater Woonsocket area. Their mission is to feed the body, mind, and spirit of each individual person. They believe that a full stomach is just the first step to a new beginning. New Beginnings is on the verge of completing renovations at its first-ever permanent home in the former Le Club Par X on Woonsocket's west side and will soon start to serve meals again. Our donation of \$400 will help New Beginnings move forward with appliance installations, plumbing work and final touches ahead of planned inspections before officially opening their doors again.

In addition, the committee voted to give \$500 to the Southern Poverty Law Center. The SPLC is a catalyst for racial justice in the South and beyond, working in partnership with communities to dismantle white supremacy, strengthen intersectional movements, and advance the human rights of all people. Their lawsuits have toppled institutional racism and stamped out remnants of Jim Crow segregation; destroyed some of the nation's most violent white supremacist groups; and protected the civil rights of children, women, the disabled, immigrants and migrant workers, the LGBTQ community, prisoners, and many others who faced discrimination, abuse or exploitation. SPLC's Learning for Justice also plays an important role in their mission. Through dialogue with communities, advocacy learning opportunities for adults and youth, critical conversations that center race and history, and education justice resources created to ensure public schools remain a viable support in communities, LFJ supports expanding opportunities for civic and political participation for collective impact. Our donation powers SPLC's work to confront hate, stand up to injustice, and defend civil and human rights. From the courtroom to the classroom to communities across the country, we have helped to create a more just and inclusive future for all.

Part of your Missions giving helps to fund the Minister's Discretionary Fund. In previous years, Missions has pledged \$600 over the course of the year to this fund. Due to the high level of need in the community and to help Reverend Sean help those facing dire emergencies, the committee voted to increase the pledge to \$1,200 this year (\$100/month).

Lastly, in conjunction with the generosity of the Broaster House, we continue to support the Men's Shelter in Woonsocket. Once a month, Bob Meo and Steve Wowk deliver a hot meal to the men who are sheltering there. Sandy Gamache provides homemade goodies. The dinner and dessert are greatly appreciated by all and will continue until the shelter closes at the end of March.

OUTREACH

The Outreach and Action Committee

BY JIM ROBshaw

“Change will not come if we wait for some other person, or if we wait for some other time. We are the ones we’ve been waiting for. We are the change we seek.” Barack Obama

The Outreach and Action Committee of SCC, UCC is official! The O&A mission includes all things human rights and everything in the United Church of Christ (UCC) Open and Affirming campaign. Look for announcements in the next few weeks as we begin the work including programs, opportunities and announcements that we are certain will deepen our commitment to Christian values. We will be an active group that will be asking for congregational input and participation.

To commemorate Black History Month in February Rev. Sean will be explaining “Intersectionalism” which is a way to better understand our individuality among every one else’s.

There is much work that has gone into the kickoff of this great initiative and so much to do. Thank you to all - and there are many - who make this possible.



North Smithfield Food Pantry FEBRUARY

For the Month of
February our Food
Pantry hours are:

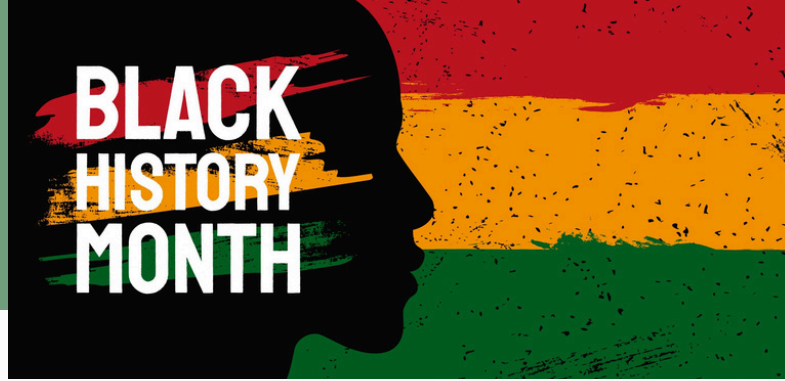
Tuesday, Feb 17th
@ 5:30 pm

Saturday, Feb 21st
@ 10:00 am

Tuesday, Feb 24th
@ 5:30 pm

Saturday, Feb 28th
@ 10:00 am

This month we are asking for donations of canned baked beans, canned fruit and dry pasta. Thank You!



Moment of Reflection

(Shared Sunday February 1, 2026)

BY MISSY MCNEIL

Good morning,

I am here as a representative of our newly formed Outreach & Action Committee. As part of our work here at Slatersville Congregational Church we would like to periodically offer a moment of reflection.

This moment of reflection invites us to slow down and remember why our work together is so important. We gather not only to act, but to listen - to God, to one another and to the voices of our neighbors and those who promote peace and social justice outside of our own community.

Given that today is the start of Black History Month, we chose to share a quote from former president Barack Obama.

He says...

“Change will not come if we wait for some other person or if we wait for some other time. We are the ones we’ve been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.”

These words reflect the spirit of Black History Month and the call to faith in action. Black history teaches us that transformation is born when people of courage thoughtfully respond to the moment before them, trusting that God works through willing hands and open hearts. For generations, Black leaders, organizers, and everyday believers refused to wait for justice to arrive; instead, they became its living witnesses.

In this same spirit, the Outreach and Action Committee of Slatersville Congregational Church is called to move beyond waiting and into service – to stand with the marginalized, to seek justice with love, and to turn faith into action. As we honor Black History Month, we are reminded that the work of change continues, and that we, too, are called to be the change our community is looking and praying for.

May this time of reflection open our hearts, renew our compassion, and guide our work in faith, humility, and love.

Outreach & Action Committee News...

BY JEAN MEO

February is Black History Month. The following events in Rhode Island may be of interest:

February 4, Wednesday: PPAC Celebrates a Legacy of Community Impact. Say It Loud, Wonders of the Wurlitzer Series. 12 Noon at PPAC, Free, Bring a lunch if desired.

February 6, Friday: Black History Month Film Festival Presentation. 9:30 AM – Noon, Wheeler School, 216 Hope St., Providence (ribff.org)

February 12, Thursday: Ray Rickman – Civil Rights Kid – one-man presentation, 7:00 – 9:30 PM, Courthouse Center for the Arts, 3481 Kingston Road, West Kingston. Visit website courthousearts.org for tickets (\$20 - \$30)

February 21, Saturday: Black History on Providence’s East Side Walking Tour 11 AM, John Brown House Museum, 52 Power Street, Providence. Tickets \$15

All Month: RISD’s Black Biennial 2026, Please Catch Me When I Fall. Gelman Gallery, Chace Center (RISD Museum). 20 No. Main Street, Providence January 24, 2026 – March 15, 2026, Tuesday – Sunday, 10 AM – 5 PM

All Month: “Owning Our History” Exhibit at RI State House. 82 Smith St, Providence, Lower Level January 14, 2026 – February 27, 2026, Monday – Friday, 8:30 AM – 4:30 PM ([firstunitarianprov.org/owning-our-history/.](http://firstunitarianprov.org/owning-our-history/))

Handbell CHOIR

Handbell Choir News

BY JILL BODAY

Margaret, Martha, and I attended the annual Handbell Winter Workshop at UMass, Amherst from January 30-31! We had a great time improving our handbell technique, attending classes and rehearsals over the two days. We performed a small concert at the end of our workshop. See the pictures of us in action!

The SCC handbell choir, On the Common Ringers, will be sharing music during worship starting this month! We will be playing for you about once per month and also on holidays such as Palm Sunday and Easter.

New members are always welcome. You do not need to read music or know how to ring a bell. We will teach you! Most of our members started from scratch. We rehearse Thursday evenings from 6:30-7:30pm, right before Senior Choir rehearsal.



MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS



Mental Health Moment

BY JAN GOODRICH

This topic always makes me think of the Star Trek movie in which Mr. Spock walks into a high radiation chamber in order to repair the spaceship and save the crew. Before Spock dies, Captain Kirk asks him why he did this. Spock replies, "Because the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few." Of course, in real life, group-mindedness is not normally a life-and-death situation.

Churches are especially prone to problems in the realm of group-mindedness. People are very sensitive about their religious beliefs and what they feel their church should be. I personally was a part of two churches that closed their doors simply because the congregation and pastors couldn't resolve their differences of opinions.

Being group minded means to respect the views of others while still keeping our own self-respect. Here are some mental health skills to help us with that:

- Except for laws, there is no right or wrong... only differences of opinion.
- Drop the judgement against others and yourself.
- You only need your own approval.
- Don't go for the symbolic victory. In other words, don't argue just for the sake of winning.

(Jan was a Psychiatric Registered Nurse and group leader who taught mental health skills for daily life.)

- Remember, you always have the right to assert yourself in a cultured manner. Our church provides us with the opportunity to make an appointment with the church council to discuss any issues regarding our church.
- Control your mouth muscles. Our brains control our muscles.
- You can't control outer environment. We can only control ourselves and a few feet around us.
- We do not know what other people are thinking.
- Other people do not know what we are thinking.

I feel that our church is exceptionally good at being group-minded and accepting of others' beliefs and ideas. Using these skills can make us even better. Being mindful of others' needs gives us that inner smile of knowing that we can still be kind and respectful even in difficult group situations.

Next month I will conclude by giving you an entire working list of the mental health skills I have used in this series.