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UCC/VF's Weekly Newsletter

# The FORGE

## PURPOSE STATEMENT

The United Church of Christ at Valley Forge, following in the Way of Jesus, is called by God to deepen our relationships with the Spirit and our faith community so that we will be empowered to reach out widely to our neighbors in love, justice, hospitality, healing, and hope.

Scripture for  
This Sunday  
Genesis 17:1-7  
Mark 8:31-38

## Shadow and Light: Stretching

*In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.*

- Mark 1:9-14

I remember one time thinking that I had finished cleaning and tidying up my living room. And then about three hours later the lowering sun brought light at a new angle into my living room. And the changing light revealed a colony of dust bunnies that I had not seen before in the corner. I did not like the exposure so much -- revealing my cleaning failure and that there was more work to do, but ultimately, per my goal of cleaning the living room, the light was a gift.

Jesus, full of God's light and breath, was led from the baptismal experience into the wilderness by God's Spirit for a time of testing. In the light, at one with the divine, it is safe and good and possible to look at the darkness or shadows and what lurks there. Why? So that Jesus will become aware of what is within him and around him that could get in the way, and he can, with the Spirit with and in him, be empowered to say "no" to those things or ways, and to keep stretching and moving in God's better way.

As we begin our Lenten journey this year, we are reminded here at the outset that as we stretch (lengthen = Lent) choose the light, as we breathe the breath of the Spirit, then God will help us to see the shadows and what dwells in them, just like Jesus. But such revelation is never to shame us, but only to heal and empower us. As we see the shadows that the light reveals, then we know what can repeatedly get in the way, and learn, with God's help and strength, how to keep saying "no" to the old ways, and "yes" to God's new way. The old ways are always about separation -- what keeps us from God and others and the truth of who we are as God's beloved children. But often we have not seen or known them, we have just lived them. *(Next page)*

SUNDAY - FEB. 25

LENT 2

9:00 a.m. - Lenten Study  
10:30 a.m. Worship Celebration  
Sunday School/ Middle School  
Sunday Morning Breakfast Club

THIS COMING WEEK

Mon. - 1:00 p.m. Grief Support  
Wed. - 2:00 p.m. Caring Crafters  
7:30 p.m. Spiritual Life Group  
Thur. - 10:30 a.m. Spiritual Life Group  
7:30 p.m. Senior Choir rehearsal  
Fri. - 7:30 p.m. UCCVF Talent Show

NEXT SUNDAY - MAR. 4

LENT 3

9:00 a.m. - Lenten Study  
10:30 a.m. Worship Celebration  
Sunday School/ Middle School  
Sunday Morning Breakfast Club  
Shelter Night at Old First

UPCOMING

Mon. Mar. 5 - Board of Elders meeting  
Sun. Mar. 18 - Congregational Conversations following worship

As we awaken more and more, the light brightens, and then we can see more the contrasts so that we can choose the ways that keep us united with the Spirit, and that empower others to know this light and life, too.

Love,  
*Michael Bush*

Pastor

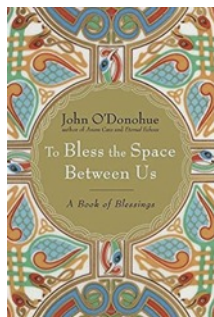
**Listen to & download Sunday's message**

<http://www.uccvf.org/sermonmp3.html>

***BLESS THE SPACE BETWEEN US* Lenten Series**

*Sundays 9 am to 10 am*

*Through 3/25*



Join Angela Steel and Chris Jackson on Sunday mornings (from 9 am to 10) for a 6-week Lenten series exploring the blessings of the late Irish poet, John O'Donohue. O'Donohue was a priest whose teaching and writing inspired folks from all religious and spiritual backgrounds. His written work and speaking engagements focused on everything from relationships to the environment to creativity in the workplace.

Using his book *To Bless the Space Between Us*, participants will listen to the written blessings spoken by the author and then reflect on the elegant poetic language and spiritual insights.

A sign-up sheet is on the bulletin board. Or, send an email to [church](#) saying "Sign me up!"

On behalf of the Adult Spiritual Formation Team,  
--Nathanael Vissia

**UCCVF TALENT  
SHOW**

**7:30 pm to 9:15 pm**

**Friday, March 2 (snow date March 9)**



Come enjoy an evening of fun with our own members sharing their talents. We have new performers as well as some returning ones. Lots of humor and a relaxing evening – all free of charge.

Refreshments, including tea, coffee and hot chocolate will be available in the Gathering Area starting at 7:15 pm and during a 15 minute intermission half-way through the show. We look forward to seeing you there.

## SERVING THIS SUNDAY

Greeter - Dianne Ludovic

Ushers - Grover Emrich and  
Mark Fehnel

Lighting the Worship Candle -  
The Shelton family

Liturgist - Christine Durst

Soundboard  
Matt Harrington

Lean on Me Prayer Partners  
Christine Durst and  
Sam Matthews

Infants/Toddlers  
Tori Hall and Emily Sheehan

## In Our Prayers

- Healing and patience for Anna Eaglehouse, granddaughter of Sam and Melba Matthews who is recovering from a concussion.
- Comfort and peace for Martha Parrish Bush's sister, Maggie, who has stage 4 bone cancer.
- Healing for Walt Glazier, son-in-law of Doug and Joan Johnson who is struggling in his surgical recovery.
- Healing and strength for Emily Mancuso.

## ***A Land Twice Promised***

Please join us for an evening of interfaith storytelling and discussion with the captivating Israeli storyteller Noa Baum THIS **Sun., February 25 from 4:00 to 6:00 pm.**

She will be performing her story called "A Land Twice Promised," weaving together her memories of growing up as a Jew in Jerusalem with those of a Palestinian Christian woman who also grew up in Jerusalem. Noa's life mission is to use storytelling as a way to start dialogues and bridge divides between people of all types, and in this way she participates in *tikkun olam* ("repairing the world") that Michael has preached about recently.

This event is being hosted by the Cheltenham Area Multi-faith Council (CAMC) and will be held at Gratz College in the Elkins Park neighborhood of northern Philadelphia. We may be able to arrange carpools if enough people from the church are interested in going. **Tickets are \$10 each. Please let Christine Durst know if you would like to attend.** Checks can be made out to "CAMC" and you can give the payments to Christine Durst, who will collect and submit them.

Noa will also be selling copies of her book (also called "A Land Twice Promised") at this event. Christine highly recommends this book! Here is a link from a recent [TEDx talk](#). In addition, Playgrounds for Palestine - a vendor who has been at our fair-trade Alternative Gift Market for the past few years - will be selling their delicious Palestinian olive oil at this event, to raise funds for Palestinian children to have access to safe, well-maintained playgrounds.



#### UPCOMING GREETERS

Mar. 4 - Mary Urso

Mar. 11 - Brian Wynne

Mar. 18 - Karen Jackson

#### UPCOMING USHERS

Mar. 4 - Jody Canale and Janice Coffey

Mar. 11 - Chris Maurizio and Brian Miller

Mar. 18 - The McAleer family

#### UPCOMING FELLOWSHIP TIME

Feb. - The Neubig Flock

Mar. - The Schultz Flock

Apr. - The Flora Flock

#### SOUNDBOARD

Mar. 4 - Jeff Durst

Mar. 11 - Chris Maurizio

Mar. 18 - Lauren Patrick

#### WORSHIP CANDLE

Mar. 4 - Elisa Maugeri and Luca

Mar. 11 - Chris Jackson

Mar. 18 - TBA

#### UPCOMING LITURGISTS

Mar. 4 - Ed Matthews

Mar. 11 - Catherine Smith

Mar. 18 - Kim Mehle

**SMALL GROUPS** - Join us as we seek immersion in Spirit to awaken to shadow and light.

*Whether you have previously participated or not, you are welcome to try one out.*

### **Sunday morning Lenten series - see page 2**

#### **Wednesday Night Spiritual Life Group - Gospel of Matthew**

Come join us each Wednesday evening 7:30-8:30 at UCCVF. We open with prayer, sometimes share some goodies, read and talk about the text and how it connects with our contemporary situation, and close with a prayer circle. Matthew's Gospel is often best known for the Beatitudes and Sermon on the Mount. We will look at these teachings, the context, the symbols, and more. Pastor Michael Bush will facilitate the conversation.

#### **Thursday Morning Spiritual Life Group - Book of Exodus**

Many have seen the *Ten Commandments* film that tells part of the Exodus story, but we offer an opportunity to look at this story more fully and connect it with the stories of our own spiritual journey. Some questions we will consider include: What are the stories we have not commonly heard in this narrative? Why did Israel tell this story? How and why has this story so often spoken to oppressed and hurting people (like African slaves)? As citizens of a modern empire and also fragile human beings who can experience bondage in different ways, how does this story of Empire and liberation from bondage speak to us individually and as communities of people? Come join us each Thursday morning from 10:30-11:30 a.m. at UCCVF. We open with prayer, sometimes share some goodies, read and talk about the text and how it connects with our contemporary situation, and close with a prayer circle. Pastor Michael facilitates. Come and see!

**Sunday Morning Prayer Advocacy Ministry:** This group meets monthly for a time of praying for one another and for anyone requesting prayer. They also read and discuss various books on prayer and healing as a way to grow in understanding and practice of prayer. We meet generally the second Sunday of the month 9:00 AM-10 AM For more information contact [Gwynne Hagee](#). The next meeting will be held Sunday, Mar. 11.

**Grief Support Group:** Pastor Michael continues leading a monthly Grief Recovery group here at UCCVF for those who have suffered the loss of a loved one and are grieving. Next meeting February 26 at 1:00 p.m.

**Lean on Me Prayer Ministry:** The Lean On Me prayer ministry is a one-on-one prayer time that is offered *every Sunday after worship*. Two of our Prayer Partners will be seated in the chapel chairs in the Sanctuary. You are welcome to come and sit next to one of them, tell them what you would like to pray about (a joy, concern, or thanksgiving) and then the Prayer Partner will lift you up in prayer.



### **HAVE YOU LIKED US ON FACEBOOK?**

Our Facebook page offers links to articles connected with faith life, periodic reminders, photos and more!

Click [HERE](#) to visit.

## News about the Board of Elders

Entering into 2018, Beth Eustis, Moderator of the Elders, will be pursuing her next steps of her seminary training by embarking on her Student Ministry practicum and internship. Due to time constraints, she has resigned as Moderator and from the Elders. We are very pleased to announce that Juliana Bissell Flora has agreed to become an Elder and she will be embracing the role of Elder for Beth's flock of members. The Eustis Flock will now be called the Flora Flock. Over the next several weeks, Juliana will be contacting the members of her new flock. Marni Schultz and Sue Bradley, currently part of the Board of Elders, have agreed to serve as Co-Moderators for 2018.

The Board of Elders wants to announce the second round of the Congregational Conversations scheduled for after worship on **Sunday, March 18**. This second phase of the Congregational Conversations will engage small group discussions around the findings of the informal brainstorming sessions held during Autumn 2017. During the small group discussion on March 18, members will have the opportunity to review and prioritize the findings of the brainstorming sessions to develop a collection of priority to be presented to the Church Council for further review and discussion. We encourage all to join in these small group discussions after worship on **Sunday, March 18th**.

### MORE INFO BELOW

## SAVE THE DATE: SUNDAY Mar. 18 What Matters: Congregational Conversations

Five years ago, we began a series of Congregational Conversations that led to a UCCVF Purpose Statement and then a set of priorities that have guided our ministry and mission decision-making. Some examples:

1. One priority was to address the lack of education and experience for our youth and children around being fully included in the worshiping community on Sundays. This has led to the formation of an All-Ages Worship Team, which brought changes to our service every Sunday (such as percussion instruments given to our young people) as well as some All-Ages Worship Sundays in which we have experimented with various ideas to make our worship service more inclusive of the whole generational spectrum.
2. Another priority was to increase opportunities for Adult Spiritual Formation. This led to the formation of an Adult Spiritual Formation Team (representatives from Staff, CE, and Elders). One fruit of this work was the recently released brochure (for the second year) revealing an entire program year of classes, groups, retreats, and opportunities.
3. Another priority was forming relationships that foster hands-on/local mission opportunities. Recent connection with Philadelphia-based ArtWell is one new relationship that has emerged from this focus.

We continue to RENEW these conversations to discern what priorities the Spirit is calling us to in this season of our life together. We engaged the first part on Oct. 29 as we focused on our purpose and began brainstorming. Sunday Mar. 18 we will meet together in smaller groups after worship to engage a process to discern what we are called to prioritize from our brainstormed lists. (see pg. 6&7)

Come and see! We need your participation and input!

Peace to you,

*The Church Council*

**Q 1: What are commitments that UCCVF currently makes or could make that would help us deepen our roots in God? (deepen relationship with God).**

CHOOSE THREE

1. Strengthen commitment of each member in gathering weekly together for worship
2. Continue to develop and increase opportunities for all-ages inclusive worship, which includes creativity (making room for the Spirit to do new things among us), such as using different types of media and members of all ages leading parts of worship.
3. Each member of UCCVF participates in our increasing number of Spiritual Formation small group opportunities (from Bible studies to film series, etc. Also, consider having some of these outside church building, including in homes).
4. We tell our stories of how Spiritual Formation with UCCVF has impacted/transformed us (verbal, written, etc) throughout the year (not just summer, stewardship).
5. Teaching and experiences that helps us with daily prayer practice, including those involving physical movement and from various faith traditions (yoga, meditation practices, dance, etc).
6. One on One Spiritual mentoring/partnering, including talking and praying together
7. Laying on of hands prayer - blessing, sending, healing
8. At-home resources for spiritual practices (take home prayers, Facebook/social media, Chaos and the Kingdom book, sermons online, online devotionals).

**Q2: What are commitments that help or would help our congregation deepen roots as a church community together (deepened relationships within the faith community)?**

CHOOSE THREE

1. Spiritual formation that includes social time - i.e. meal and study, film and discussion.
2. Each member commit to serve in ways within the church community ("snack room," choir, committee, greeters, team, teach, lead groups, lead worship, etc.) to build relationships
3. Work (service, in-house, wider community) that we do together as a church, especially all-ages
4. Mindful of and present to church members' joys and concerns (all members do this, not just staff or Elders. Perhaps prayer partners/buddy system)
5. Gathering regularly (weekly, bi-weekly, monthly) with other people in our faith community in a variety of settings beyond Sunday worship: in-home prayer/fellowship group, parent groups, take someone to lunch, have over for dinner, hike in VF, bike, run, game group, etc.
6. Pet blessing - bringing together pet owners for blessing and fellowship
7. Share stories of how participating in a group has helped us know each other and share more life in the world.
8. Members intentionally build relationships with children/youth.
9. Online forums (Facebook private group conversations, email chats, etc.)
10. Talent night/Art Show and other ways we can share our "hidden" gifts
11. Increase our personal giving to support our ministry and mission. Could also include things like a capital campaigns to maintain/upkeep our "home" (building).
12. Training for church members to be equipped to visit in homes/hospitals.
13. Driving ministry - helping get members without own transport to church and community events.
14. More "flock-oriented" events and connectivity (flock directories, photos, meals)

**Q3: What are commitments that help or would help our congregation to reach out widely to others by helping others experience the goodness/gifts of God (invitation)?**

CHOOSE THREE

1. Focus discernment on what social justice work looks like for us (which includes discerning God's call in how we serve/work in the wider world - education and spiritual practices), and then create opportunities for action (forming actions teams or inviting broader congregational participation). We can also partner with other groups (like POWER Metro or prison ministry) and churches to help us better know what needs work and how to do it. Focus energy and attention on 1 or 2 partnerships rather than widely dispersing our energies.
2. Seeing our various existing small groups as continuing outreach into wider community (i.e. a weekly spiritual small group might have a mission or justice ministry outreach focus as well).
3. Tell our UCCVF story (bear witness) in wider community (participating in public events, talk to neighbors, sponsor spiritual music concerts, etc).
4. Stretch more widely our extravagant welcome - not complacent with what we already do, but discerning how we might welcome those who are not yet welcomed (non-binary restrooms, for example, worship that is not as euro-centric, more LGBT events, welcoming message on web, social media, signage).
5. Explore and engage creation stewardship- caring for the earth/environment.
6. Intergenerational Mission Trip (not just youth, doesn't have to be far - could be Philly).
7. Expand web/social media presence - in addition to sermons, add some music, Children's Time, Nathanael talking about CE, etc.
8. Inter and Intrafaith dialogue
9. UCCVF building used more - AA, Support groups, homeless shelter rotations, etc. to share ministry in our community.

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***The rocks placed in front of the pulpit symbolize the boulder rolled from Christ's tomb.***

***From death, life shall spring.***

***Keep watching.***

***Come and See!***



## FELLOWSHIP GROUPS

The **Caring Crafters** meet on Wednesday afternoons from 2-4 p.m. at UCCVF to create items for charity. No crafting experience necessary! Email the [church office](#) if you would like to join the group.

The **Monthly Dinner Out** group meets monthly at local eateries for fun and fellowship. Members are asked to sign up to pick a place to eat and organize the meal. If you would like to join the group, please let [Rosemary McKinley](#) know. This month's meal will be held at Brickside Grille in Exton When: TOMORROW Friday, February 23 at 6:30 PM Address: 540 Wellington Square, Exton, PA 19341. Please email the [church office](#) if you would like to join us!

**UCCVF Bridge Group** - We meet once a month at various locations. All are welcome - any level of expertise is invited from novice to experienced. It is a social group. Dessert and coffee or tea will be served and then we start playing cards. Contact [Phil Clark](#) for more info.

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## Update on Power Metro

In December, Lena Glickman from Power Metro came to discuss the issue of healthcare. The next step for us is to arrange to meet with Rep. Ryan Costello at his West Chester office some time in March. Lauren Patrick, Beth Eustis and our point person Susan Wargo are in talks with Lena to make this happen. Please let Susan, Lauren or Beth know what concerns you have that we may want to bring to our representatives at a future date (immigration, food scarcity, etc.) We hope to do more (meetings, lobby visits, marches, etc.) with Power Metro in the future!

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### COMMUNITY PRAYER BREAKFAST

The Phoenixville Area Social Concerns Committee will hold its 24th Annual Community Prayer Breakfast in memory of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on Saturday, April 7, 2018, 8:00 a.m. at the Phoenixville Area Middle School cafeteria. The Keynote Speaker this year is Reverend Jim Wallis, President & Founder of Sojourners, Washington DC.

Tickets are \$12 and may be purchased by contacting Gwynne Hagee. A flyer with the details is posted on the bulletin board and more info can be found [here](#).

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Marni Schultz and Sue Bradley  
Co-Moderators of Elders