

# The Pilgrim

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*"Open my eyes, so that I may behold wondrous things out of your law"*  
– Psalm 119:18

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Dear Friends,

Every year, after the celebrations of Easter morning, we Christians have an opportunity to begin again. What does our new life together look like? Just like those first disciples who had to decide what they would become after the final departure of Jesus, we are challenged by changing times and circumstances to ask, *"What does Christ hope to do through us now?"* Yes, we are told that Pentecost's outpouring of Spirit will comfort and guide us, but this does not spare us from the responsibility of discernment. Especially now, 2,000 years after the fact, how can we see with clarity "the Way of Jesus," after so many generations of believers have adapted his words to fit their own agendas? And how can we be sure that we're not doing the same?



Our Sunday Worship series in April & May, "When Love Meets Wisdom," is an attempt to guide us through these questions by seeing ourselves (and our tradition) with fresh eyes. Though ostensibly a conversation between Christianity and Buddhism, our hope is to gain insight and inspiration by looking at our post-Easter stories against the backdrop of a new worldview. Each week, through special music, select meditations, and stimulating sermons, we'll hope to

explore the Gospel as if for the very first time, offering you new ways of hearing Christ's call in your own life.

While this is happening, our April/May ArtReach exhibition (*Conceal · Reveal*) features the work of two Buddhist artists: Sanje Elliott and Jef Gunn. Through their powerful collection, we'll have a chance to savor the intimate experiences of chant, mantra, and repetitive prayer. Not only is this a glimpse into contemporary Buddhist practice that is both beautiful and moving in its own right, it also begs us to find our own Gospel versions of these practices, and rediscover the deep and rich history of Christian mysticism that is so often overlooked in the United States. On May 3rd our guest artists will lead our Thursday Night "Way of the Rose" group to explore some of these themes through meditation, and all are invited to join as they are able (6:30 pm in the Fellowship Hall).



# Poor People's Campaign

## A NATIONAL CALL for MORAL REVIVAL

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Now because the launch of the Poor People's Campaign is right around the corner (on Mother's Day, May 13th), I'd be remiss not to offer a brief update here. If you haven't had a chance to hear about the specific demands of this national campaign, check out the national website - [poorpeoplescampaign.org](http://poorpeoplescampaign.org) - to read more and to sign the pledge. Through the course of this work there will be opportunities for us to connect with people of faith from all over the country around some of the most pressing issues of our times: poverty, race, militarism, and environmental degradation. Note that the for this initial launch, activities will be focused on the capitol buildings of every participating state, and here in Oregon that means we'll be driving down to Salem for one day of action every week. If this sounds like something you're interested in, start reserving your Mondays (as you are able) from 5/14 – 6/18, and reach out to Rev. Michael Ellick ([ellick@uccportland.org](mailto:ellick@uccportland.org)) if you're interested in ride sharing. Because of the old adage "action proceeds reflection," I think this too offers us a fresh opportunity to see ourselves in a new light, and I hope you will consider joining me for this historic revival of the Civil Rights Movement.

For now, I'll leave you with a prayer inspired from Psalm 119: *May all of us behold wondrous things together, and in the beauty of this restored vision, may we do only what Christ would do through us.*

*In faith,*  
*Rev. Michael Ellick*

# Moderator Note

Sarah Vazquez



*“Better is one handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and a striving after wind.” Eccl. 4:6*

Easter has come; He has risen, Alleluia! As we turn towards spring, what are ways in which you implement time and space

for Sabbath into the rhythm of your busy lives?

This is the time of year when my senses awaken to the possibility of new life. I want to lace up my hiking boots and get outside as quickly as I can. Renewal is all around us— beneath us in the soil, above us in the trees, and beyond us in the horizon. I want to breathe it in, adjust my sails, and soak up every ounce of new life and rain-freshened air.

Lately though, as excited as I am for all things new and the faithful Oregon sun, I have found myself seeking and needing quietude...rest. Sabbath. I am learning to find joy in the rest as much as in the work, journeys and adventures.

I’ve been reflecting on my work here in the past few months and in the busyness of this work, I have found renewal in the fellowship and community with each of you. There are three main areas in which I’ve had the pleasure of working alongside some of you—I’d like to share updates for each of these:

## Council:

Your 2018 church council has held three monthly meetings thus far and in these gatherings, we have begun to create meeting guidelines to keep us accountable in achieving our agreed upon objectives while holding space for all attendees and their contributions. These guidelines will be a living document to direct how we interact in our meetings moving forward. We have spent this time in spiritual fellowship and discernment with regard to our



journey this year and have created a Blessings Prayer with which we open our meetings. The graphic above was designed to help us visualize this prayer and the spiritual work it represents.

We are currently designing a congregation-wide strategic visioning process, which will coincide with the three-year evaluation of Rev. Michael Ellick in his role as Senior Minister. Our Church’s Council is tasked as much with listening and community building as planning and steering. As we begin the deep work of visioning our life together, please reach out to me with your ideas and/or questions. And most importantly, please join us for our next meeting!

## Business:

Our business manager, Cara Rothe, has worked hard to lease our gathering spaces to various groups. As a result, we have become well-known for hosting non-profit events. This has helped us bring in artists and organizations whose messages directly align with our outreach efforts for peacekeeping, social justice, and community building. One such event (held on March 15th) was “Police, Power and Privilege”, a fundraiser for Oregon Justice Resource Center, which featured Black Lives Matter activist DeRay McKesson.





*Members at the ATR training at First Presbyterian Church in March*

Notable upcoming performers include Alok Vaid-Menon, a gender non-conforming performance artist & spoken word poet, and Deva Premal, a celebrated chant master.

**Safety:** The Safety and Families Ministries teams have been collaborating to update the Safe Church Plan for our children. This comprehensive plan includes policies and procedures, sign-in rosters, child information sheets, incident report forms, and handouts for families.

The Safety Team also attended an Active Threat Response Training at First Presbyterian Church in early March. We learned about response procedures for such events, and gained insight about ways in which UCC Safety can mentor neighboring churches in their safety philosophy, safety team building, and logistical implementation. UCC's Safety Team holds a unique approach in that unconditional positive regard for individuals is paramount in maintaining a welcome that speaks to who we are as the congregation of a peacemaking, justice-seeking, wholly inclusive refuge and sanctuary for all.

I am ever so thankful and blessed with the opportunity to be your moderator.

*Love and Light,  
Sarah Vazquez*

## New Adventures in Spring with Children, Youth & Families

Our children, youth and families have had a lively Spring at First Congregational! We celebrated Mardi Gras with our annual Shrove Pancake Breakfast on Sunday, February 11. Thanks to your generous contributions, we raised over \$400 for our youth trips this summer...thank you! To help families enter the Lenten season, the Family Ministries Team hosted a Parents Gathering before church on February 25. We gathered in the church library for breakfast, fellowship and a short spiritual reflection and craft ("wonder boxes") led by Batya Podos and Rev. Elizabeth. The gathering was much needed, and we have already scheduled another one for May 6th.

For Lent this year, we explored ways to bring children more into the life of our church. Each Sunday in Lent, our "Call to Worship" (based on the Psalms) included a specific set of lines for the children to say. Many thanks to Journey Helbley, a first-grader, who helped lead the children one Sunday. After church during Fellowship hour, we colored big posters of the Psalm readings with bright markers and lots of creative doodles by kids and adults. Our Godly Play for Lent invited the children to explore the "Faces of Easter" stories about Jesus' life. We are so grateful for our teachers: Batya Podos, Anne Sullivan, Rev. Amanda Guthrie, Chris Clark, Daniel Hunter and Eileen Deerdock. We need more teachers/assistants, so please see Batya Podos or Rev. Elizabeth if you can offer your presence for one Sunday this year!





Our youth group continues to meet regularly. On March 9th-10th, we had our first youth group “lock-in” overnight at Cedar Hills United Church of Christ (CHUCC) with youth from that church and from Vancouver UCC. A total of 28 youth (8 of them from our church) spent Friday night playing games, eating pizza, and improvising skits of stories in the Bible where people showed courage. Rev. Elizabeth and Rev. Jen Brownell from Vancouver led a discussion about what it means to be courageous in the world today. We went out to the movies for a late night showing of “Wrinkle in Time,” then spent the night at CHUCC. Our middle and high school youth had a great time and we are already planning more opportunities to gather with other UCC youth.



On March 24, a number of our youth and families participated in the “March For Our Lives” in support of students across our nation calling for an end to gun violence. The next morning, our Palm Sunday processional was an “inside peace march” with the children waving palms and singing “Hosanna” as we marched through the sanctuary. Many thanks to Julius who helped pass out palms to the congregation and to Anna and JoJo Mella who served as candle-lighters.



On Easter Sunday we celebrated some new variations on our usual tradition. The children remained in worship with their parents and we had a family-friendly service, with a children’s bulletin with special activities and a dramatic interpretation of the Easter story in the Gospel of John by members of the choir. Rev. Elizabeth gathered the children around the table during communion and engaged them in the story. After worship, the younger children enjoyed an Egg Hunt downstairs (with eggs cleverly hidden by our youth group) while the youth group had a Bible Hunt for Starbucks cards in the church library with Rev. Elizabeth. Many thanks to Anne Sullivan for filling the eggs and organizing us!

## Meet & Greet

### *Introducing Annie Tarter, Teen Ministry Coordinator*

We are thrilled to welcome Annie Tarter, our new Teen Ministry Coordinator! Annie will be leading our middle and high school youth group with Rev. Elizabeth, working part-time (primarily on weekends). Annie has already met with members of our Family Ministries Team, and we are so impressed with her energy, creativity, and passion for working with youth. Annie's first Sunday with us will be April 15, 2018.



Annie joins us after graduating from Western Oregon University in June of 2017 and moving to Portland in July of the same year. During her teenage years, Annie was highly involved in the youth and teen programs at the UCC congregation in Eugene, and she is so excited to bring that continued energy into her work with the youth group at First Congregational. Some of Annie's greatest joys in life involve supporting those around her, recognizing their accomplishments, and celebrating them in the process. Annie is eager to support and encourage the youth at First Congregational, and to help bolster a youth program that is already filled with hope and care. Outside of her work with First Congregational, Annie supports college student living in the Residence Halls and supervises a staff of 11 Resident Assistants at PSU as a Residence Director with University Housing and Residence Life.

**Welcome Annie!**



# Life in Our Church

## COMMUNITY CORE MINISTRY

### Eve's Circle

If you're interested in joining in on the fun, Eve's Circle usually meets the fourth Saturday of each month, from 10am – noon in the Fellowship Hall. Watch the church media or stop by the pencil table during fellowship hour each week to find out what's next. All those female-identified are welcome.

Here's what's in store for the rest of the year:

April 28 – Jan Holt, artist and docent at the Portland Art Museum, will discuss, demonstrate and give us a hands-on experience in printmaking. \$5/person, hosted by Elaine Molskness.

May 19 – Annual Women's Retreat hosted by Eve's Circle.

June 23 – Let's talk books again with Julie Wallace of Wallace Books in Sellwood, hosted by Sandy Hill

July 28 – Planning for the upcoming year's programs

### Women's Retreat Planned for May 19:

#### Braving the Wilderness

#### *Showing Up Unapologetically as Our True Selves*

"True belonging requires us to believe in and belong to ourselves so fully that we can find sacredness both in being a part of something and in standing along when necessary. But in a culture that's rife with perfectionism and pleasing, and with the erosion of civility, it's easy to stay quiet, hide in our ideological bunker, or fit in rather than show up as our true selves and brave the wilderness of uncertainty and criticism."

– Brené Brown

Come along to our 2018 retreat as we explore the theme of "true belonging," presented by Reverend Elizabeth Durant and Ann Laskey.

In Psalm 139, the writer tells us that the Holy One who made us knows, accepts and loves us just as we are. But the world around us is divisive and violent, pushing us to judgment, self-criticism and disconnection.

How do we experience ourselves as grounded, protected, and held in God's wisdom and love in a practical, full-body way?

Our day will invite us to own and claim our own belonging and belovedness through song, art, stories, meditation and silence. We'll draw from the work of Brené Brown, Sonya Renee Taylor and Geneen Roth, as well as our own personal and ancestral wisdom.

Our annual retreat happens in the wilderness of Camp Adams on May 19, 8 am - 8pm (with the option to stay Friday or Saturday nights). All those female-identified are welcome. Pick up an application on the Pencil Table in the Fellowship Hall. Registration ends May 11. Scholarships available. Please address questions and scholarship requests (no application necessary) to Janine Vaughn ([gjvaughan@hotmail.com](mailto:gjvaughan@hotmail.com)) or Karen Hurst ([karenjune25@gmail.com](mailto:karenjune25@gmail.com)).

### The Soul Box Project: You Are Amazing!



In late January a pile of boxes appeared in the chapel. It was the first public art installation by the Soul Box Project. When the pile appeared that afternoon in the chapel, the boxes numbered 752, one Box for every



child aged 11 or younger who was killed or injured by gunfire in the US in 2017. So many of you were touched by this installation. Evidence of that came in the 949 Soul Boxes you added to the installation. You folded. Your friends folded. Your neighbors folded. Thank you.

Then, on March 24, several of you marched with the young people in the March For our Lives in Portland. Marchers carried 4,624 Soul Boxes – one for every child 18 or younger killed or injured by gunfire in the US in the past 15 months. First Congregational served as the collection point for the Boxes after the march. Though the initial installation has been replaced in the chapel, you will have another opportunity to contribute to The Soul Box Project in the months ahead. A massive installation – 36,000 Soul Boxes – is planned for February 2019 at the State Capitol in Salem. The 1,701 or so Soul Boxes from our chapel installation have already been added to the inventory.



The Soul Box Project is a community art project to reveal the growing number of gunfire victims. Its mission is to have one handmade origami box for every person killed or injured by guns in the US since 2014. In the tradition of other national art projects like the AIDS Memorial Quilt, the goal is to display hundreds of thousands of Soul Boxes together, illustrating the staggering number of victims in a way that cannot be ignored. The Soul Box Project is the brainchild of local artist Leslie Lee, who began folding boxes and organizing

the Project after the Las Vegas shooting in October. To date, she's gathered more than 7,500 boxes from around the country. More information on The Soul Box Project can be found at [www.soulboxproject.org](http://www.soulboxproject.org).

## HOSPITALITY CORE MINISTRY

Hospitality is about connecting with others. It's one of the things our church is always about, and one that we also always try to get better at. In the Hospitality Core, three of the current endeavors are Fellowship Hour food, Fellowship Hour information gathering and sharing, and ArtReach Gallery exhibitions, brochures, and activities.

The revamped Fellowship Hour has been met with positive responses. "How wonderful to know that there will be food I can eat!" "How friendly the table arrangement is." "How good I feel that I can easily help host a time I always have enjoyed being part of!" The allergen-free table is appreciated; the chance to host during one's birthday month seems welcomed; the table placement makes access easy for all. What makes it all work is participation—If you have not put your name on the appropriate birthday month list, please stop at the Pencil Table and sign up! You'll be contacted when your birthday month approaches.

Speaking of the Pencil Table, stop by each week and peruse. There is information about upcoming events you might want to take part in, about outreach that is part of our church's mission and needs volunteers, and about ongoing groups you might want to join. These are all good ways to get to know each other, to learn, and to share. The Welcome Table for visitors is right there as well, and at these tables each Sunday you'll find a member of our Church Council or a Core Facilitator with whom to chat. They will welcome your comments, questions, insights, and friendliness!

Surrounding us in Fellowship Hall is the exhibition of ArtReach Gallery. The April-May show features two Portland artists whose Tibetan meditation practice shapes their art. Look for the brochure, and be sure

to visit both the installation and the table display of tools used by Jef Gunn to make his art, as well as to explore Sanje Elliott's mandalas. Mark your calendars for the Curator's Event on Thursday evening, May 3, at 6:30, when the artists will lead participants in an introduction to Tibetan Buddhism, chanting, and how their own spiritual practice informs their paintings.

## PEACEMAKING CORE MINISTRY

### Second quarter "Spare Change" Recipient!

**SISTERS  
OF THE  
ROAD**



For the next quarter, Sisters of the Road will be the recipient of the spare change given during our weekly offerings.

Sisters Of The Road is a nonprofit Cafe in Portland's Old Town/Chinatown neighborhood. Sisters works together with folks experiencing houselessness to create systemic change that will improve conditions for those living in poverty. Five days a week, Sisters provides delicious, healthy meals for \$1.50 in a welcoming, respectful space. Its patrons are invited to do barter work in exchange for their meals, inviting our customers to be a part of running the Cafe in a cross-class, cross-cultural environment.

One of the things that makes Sisters special is its commitment to ensuring that everyone who eats here can dine with dignity. Customers tell staff and volunteers all the time that when they eat at soup kitchens they can feel like numbers in a system, but when they come to the Cafe they feel seen, appreciated, and valued. Sisters believes that everyone has the right to nourishing food in a safe place where they are invited to participate in meaningful work. Sisters customers know they will be treated with respect and kindness. Learn more at <https://sistersoftheroad.org/>.

**Spare change adds up!** As you know, our 'spare change' donations during the first quarter 2018 were

designated for Portland Committee for Human Rights in the Philippines (PCHRP). The total of our donation, \$200.33, does make a difference. Thanks, and well done!



## Bellies Do Good! Fundraiser

On February 17th, UCC hosted "Bellies Do Good," a fundraising event for Do Good Multnomah's trauma-informed women's shelter in downtown Portland. The event featured belly dancers, henna artists, food and beer, door prizes, an auction, and a host of information on other local organizations who serve women. Highlights from the fundraiser included the audience's very positive response to the creative event, and Rev. Michael trying out belly-dancing—alongside other members!

Do Good Multnomah is a non-profit organization that provides low-barrier emergency shelter for houseless Veterans in Portland, Oregon. By partnering with the community, they are establishing a model for sheltering and serving houseless Veterans that emphasizes relationship-building, one-on-one engagement, and direct community participation. The new women's shelter will use this relationship-focused, direct engagement model to provide a desperately needed safe space for women to rest and find trauma-informed support. Bellies Do Good was cosponsored and co-organized by PSU Business Honors Program and First Congregational United Church of Christ, Portland.



# Upcoming Events

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## Honoring Our Graduates in June

During worship in early June we will celebrate a wonderful year of growth, learning and service as our children and youth complete the 2017/18 program year. We'll celebrate with all our children who advance to the next grade and thank our church school volunteers. Our celebration will also include the RECOGNITION of GRADUATES - high school, post-high school programs, college, graduate school. We are in the process of compiling the list of our graduates. If you or your child is graduating from high school, college or graduate school program, please take a moment to send the graduate's name, program, major, school and future plans/next steps to Rev. Elizabeth at [edurant@uccportland.org](mailto:edurant@uccportland.org) ASAP. We want to make sure to include all those in our extended church family. Thank you!

## Help Our Youth Get to Hawaii!

Every three years the United Church of Christ hosts regional gatherings for youth. This year, Western Regional Youth Event will be hosted by the Hawaii Conference and held in Honolulu, Hawaii from June 25 to June 29. Our fundraisers have helped to cover registration costs, but we need help with the airfare! Do you have airline frequent flyer miles that you could transfer to one of our youth so that they could attend? Please contact Rev. Elizabeth ([edurant@uccportland.org](mailto:edurant@uccportland.org); 503-946-1042) if you can help us out! Thank you!

## APRIL 6-24: The Starling Project: Connect with our wider Church!

The Central Pacific Conference (CPC) of the United Church of Christ invites you to join in a conversation with members from other churches across our region. Who is God calling us to be as the United Church of Christ? How can we connect better to each other? What can God do through us that we cannot do alone as individuals of individual churches? The Starling Project continues throughout April with 13 Conference-wide conversations being hosted via Zoom Online video conferencing. Join your neighbors from around the CPC for these affinity-based, online conversations to share your perspective, concerns and ideas. View the schedule and select a group that best fits you: <https://www.starlingproject.church/schedule/>

## The Soul Box Project Continues

Thanks to everyone who folded Soul Boxes for the installation in the Chapel. We began with 752, one Box for every child aged 11 or younger who was killed or injured by gunfire in the US in 2017. In about a month you added 949 Soul Boxes! Those Boxes will be used in a massive art installation – 36,000 Soul Boxes – at the State Capitol in Salem next February. Keep folding! You'll hear about a new opportunity to display Soul Boxes in the near future. Please contact Nanci Tangeman with any questions. [www.soulboxproject.org](http://www.soulboxproject.org)

## New Visitor Potluck 4/22 & Joining Sunday 4/29

*Church Library*

If you consider yourself a "new visitor" to First Congregational Church—whether this is your first Sunday or your 100th—please consider joining us for our New Visitor Potluck on Sunday, April 22nd, at 9:00am, before church. We will gather over morning refreshments in our church library (just off the fellowship hall) so you can get to know us and we can get to know you a little better. Likewise, members are welcome to join this special circle to connect some names with some of the new faces you've seen around here recently. We will have a New Member Joining Sunday in service on April 29th. If you have been thinking about becoming a formal member, this is your chance. Please reach out to Rev. Michael Ellick ([ellick@uccportland.org](mailto:ellick@uccportland.org)), or Rev. Elizabeth Durant ([edurant@uccportland.org](mailto:edurant@uccportland.org)) with any questions.

## Eve's Circle: DIY Printmaking

Saturday, April 28, 10 am-noon

*Fellowship Hall*

Please join us for a session of gentle carving into soft foam board to create a design for printing. Portland artist, Jan Holt, will give us instruction and information on printmaking techniques. There is a \$5 fee to cover supplies.

Please RSVP to Elaine Molskness (mlsknss@gmail.com) by Thursday, April 26, though you are welcome even at the last minute.

## **Bridgetown Bluegrass Festival**

May 5, 2018

*Cider Riot*

The “Bridgetown Bluegrass Festival” (formerly named the Park Blocks Bluegrass Festival) is occurring in its second year on Saturday May, 5th 2018 at Cider Riot! with all profits going to Do-Good Multnomah Women’s Shelter. The festival, which raised \$8,700 last year, is in gear to make an even bigger impact with 2 stages, 15 iconic Pacific Northwest bluegrass bands, jam sessions and a raffle - all day long (10am-1am).

Tickets at: [goo.gl/W8MvVQ](http://goo.gl/W8MvVQ)

## **Parents’ Meeting**

Sunday, May 6th, 9am (perfectly ok to come late!)

*Church Library*

It was wonderful to see many of you last month during our Parents’ Gathering before church. We loved being together and sharing our hearts with each other. Let’s do it again! Childcare and light breakfast snacks are provided. This gathering is hosted by the Family Ministries Team. We’ll spend time sharing with each other and have a brief meditation/reflection that you can use at home with your family.

## **Women’s Retreat- Braving the Wilderness: Showing Up Unapologetically as Our True Selves**

May 19th, 2018

“True belonging requires us to believe in and belong to ourselves so fully that we can find sacredness both in being a part of something and in standing alone when necessary. But in a culture that’s rife with perfectionism and pleasing, and with the erosion of civility, it’s easy to stay quiet, hide in our ideological bunker, or fit in rather than show up as our true selves and brave the wilderness of uncertainty and criticism.”

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## **Eco Film Night is Back!**

Tuesday Evenings at 7pm

**May 1st**—Just Eat It. If 40% of all harvested food is wasted in America, what can we do about it? Hugely Entertaining!

**May 15th**—The Age of Consequences: Climate. Change. Conflict: An important film from our generals & other Pentagon insiders about the issues of global drought, conflict, migrations, and social instability due to climate change. Eye-opening and compelling!



May 22nd—More Than Honey. Best foreign film from Switzerland that looks at the vexing issue of why bees are facing extinction from California to Switzerland, China, & Australia. Exquisite photography!

Brought to you by the Caring for Creation Committee of the St. James Lutheran Church free of Charge. See you there!

We are excited to welcome more events into our church this spring! We will update our website, facebook and instagram pages with news of these, so be sure to check these regularly to see what's coming next!



Our youth at their Pancake Breakfast fundraiser (raising money to help fund their service trips this summer!)

