

## “ON THE ROAD AGAIN”

BY DR. JANET PARKER

As I sat down to write this article, Willie Nelson’s classic hit, “On the Road Again” popped into my mind. I grew up singing along to that song, and it always made the call of the road seem like such a romantic, exciting prospect. Oh, to be free and riding down the highway with a company of friends, “Goin’ places that

I’ve never been, Seein’ things that I may never see again.” I’ve done LOTS of traveling down LOTS of roads since those early sing-alongs. In the intervening years I’ve learned that there’s something even better than being off on grand adventures, and that’s coming home again. I’ve learned the inestimable value of stability, rootedness and

a place to call home. It’s something we all need, and it’s often what we look for in a church. Church, for many people, is like a second home, a second family. But just as emotional and physical storms can sometimes batter our homes, the same is true for congregations. Change happens, and it’s not usually nearly as exciting as Willie Nelson makes it out to be.

On Sunday February 10, we bid a very fond farewell to the Rev. Elizabeth Durant, who faithfully served this congregation for two and a half years as Assistant

Pastor. The worship service was beautiful and her sermon was powerful, pastoral and moving. The farewell party was celebratory and clearly conveyed the deep love and appreciation the congregation feels for Rev. Elizabeth’s ministry here. In a relatively short time, Rev. Elizabeth made a lasting imprint on this congregation. And so her departure, coming so quickly on the heels of Rev. Michael’s, was an unwanted change. And here you are, once again, forced onto a highway not particularly of your choosing, going you know not where. Your church home feels a little less stable, and a little less secure... again.

Into this context, what good word do you need to hear from your Interim Senior Minister? I could quote Heraclitus to you (“The only constant is change”), but I doubt that would be comforting. The reality is that many of you are grieving the loss of your pastors, and the upheaval that brings; many of you worry about the future of our church in an era of steep declines in “Mainline Protestant” church membership in general. Especially in the uber-secular Northwest, how will churches have to reinvent themselves to survive and thrive? Parishioners with the least tolerance for instability and insecurity in their church home have already pulled up stakes and left. And that’s understandable. Sometimes one has to leave home for one’s own health. But for those of you who are sticking



around, I want to say, “Congratulations.” You have chosen the harder road. And the harder road, the less traveled road, as any great poet or fairy tale will tell you, is the path of transformation.

In his remarkable song, “Anthem,” Leonard Cohen wrote, “Forget your perfect offering/There is a crack, a crack in everything/That’s how the light gets in.” It’s the story of the cross, the deepest mystery of our faith. Sometimes things have to get broken before they can be healed. Sometimes our world has to be turned upside down for things to turn out right. And as the cross reveals, sometimes defeat precedes the greatest victory. So here’s my good word for you, beloveds of First Congregational UCC:

There is no perfect offering, no perfect home, no perfect church, no perfect pastor, and certainly no perfect person. We’re all a bit cracked. But being church means that we have found a company of imperfect friends to travel this road of life with us, to make music with, and to make home together as we go. And in the crucible of our imperfect church and imperfect lives, if we are very brave, and very willing, that alchemical process we call transformation can take place. And suddenly, through our cracks, the Light will pour in. A light that illuminates, a light that reveals, a light that heals. And that, I do believe, is worth sticking around for.

*Yours on the road,  
Rev. Janet*

## WHAT’S NEXT?

### An Update on the Interim Process

I know that many of you are wondering where we are in the interim process, and so I wanted to give you an update. With Rev. Elizabeth’s resignation, things have slowed down a bit as we took the time to help her to exit well and to celebrate her ministry. But that’s all part of the process; it was just a part we weren’t anticipating. Things are moving ahead with the election of the new Council, which is meeting for a half-day retreat on Saturday, March 2. At this retreat, Council will take time to learn from Rev. Elizabeth’s exit interview, set goals for the coming year, consider next steps regarding staffing needs in Rev. Elizabeth’s absence, and develop plans to appoint a Transition Team and hire a consultant.

Funds have been set aside in the 2019 budget to bring in a skilled

consultant to assist with our congregational self-assessment and identify areas for focus and growth during the interim period. The Transition Team, in concert with my leadership and informed by the consultant, will help the congregation engage the five focus points of the congregation during an interim period: Reviewing the congregation’s Heritage; strengthening its Leadership; redefining its Mission; discovering its Connections; and preparing for its Future. The outcome will be the local church profile that is used to attract quality candidates for Senior Minister who will be the right fit for this congregation.

Following the completion of the church profile, a Search Committee will be formed to conduct the interview process and identify the candidate for Senior

Minister to recommend to the congregation. In the meantime, every effort will be made to cover Rev. Elizabeth’s responsibilities. Most likely, new short-term staff will be hired to take on some of these duties, while others fall to me or to volunteers from within the congregation. I am already reaching out to potential candidates for coverage in these areas. I invite your patience, your generosity of spirit, and your understanding with this process. Experience and wisdom teaches that this process should not be rushed. And a little extra support and volunteer help from congregation members will go a long way towards making this a smoother time for everyone.

*In gratitude for your commitment  
to FCUCC,  
Rev. Dr. Janet Parker*

# *I WILL CATCH YOU*

## *We Say Farewell to Rev. Elizabeth*

### *by Nanci Tangeman*

There are moments in our church life that truly are Moments in our Church Life. On Sunday, February 10, we said goodbye to Rev. Elizabeth Durant. We sent her onto the next leg of her vocational journey in a service and party full of reflection, tears and gratitude for our time together.

Change is a threshold. But a threshold opens to a world of possibility and challenge. In her sermon, “Go Away, God!”

**“Change is a threshold.  
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and challenge.”**

Rev. Elizabeth reminded us of a God who promised her, “I will catch you.” And us as well.

We came together as Rev. Elizabeth led us in the Service of Communion,

then joined hands in a circle that stretched around the entire sanctuary, but still could not contain the love and blessings of the Congregation. A fitting benediction of our time together.

Then the party began in the Fellowship Hall. A team led by Cara Rothe and Jim Sikkell organized the food: tamales catered by Tamale House and pies from the congregation. Symbols and quotes from Rev. Elizabeth’s ministry graced the tables.

There were presentations: JoJo Mella read a message written by Keelin Sullivan that reflected







the sentiments of all the youth. The youth had also put together a video highlight reel of youth group activities. “You have been such a great role model for me the last three years and I don’t know who or where I’d be now without you,” wrote Keelin. It is a sentiment shared by many in the room, young and old.

There were words of gratitude from Jessica Denniston, Alice Forsythe and Judy Bishop for Rev. Elizabeth’s leadership at retreats and events with Eve’s Circle and from Ann Laskey and Janine Vaughan for modeling how the Called to Care team could look after members of the congregation.

And there were gifts for Rev. Elizabeth, her wife Sadie, and daughters, Ellie and Naomi, including prayer shawls (one freshly knit by Janine Vaughn for Rev. Elizabeth) and spa days for the parents, and a membership to the Children’s Museum for the little girls. Moderator Anne Sullivan presented a beautifully carved box full of cards and notes from the Congregation. On behalf of Rev. Elizabeth’s Pastoral Relations Committee, Rev. Bill Cunitz draped a red minister’s stole from his own collection over Elizabeth’s shoulders symbolizing “her passion for overcoming the barriers of culture and race and a celebration of Pentacost, the season of ‘congregational fire.’”



Rev. Elizabeth began serving our congregation as Assistant Pastor on July 24, 2016, following a three month internship the previous year. Speaking the words in the Litany of Farewell, together as a congregation we read, “During our time together, we have experienced laughter and tears, fulfillment and disappointments. Guide us as we carry these cherished memories with us and move in new directions until the time when we are completely one with you and one another.”

Cherished memories, indeed.



*To listen to Rev. Elizabeth’s sermon from February 10, visit <http://bit.ly/ElizabethDurantSermon>.*

# CONFIRMATION CELEBRATION



First Congregational Church UCC was overjoyed to confirm two youth on Sunday, February 3, 2019. Keelin Sullivan (14) and Andy Mella (15) were joined by their families as Rev. Elizabeth and Rev. Janet led the confirmation ritual.

Keelin Sullivan, daughter of Bill and Anne Sullivan, is an 8th grader at West Sylvan Middle School and dances competitively with the WSMS dance team. Andy Mella, son of Doug Mella and Patty Hammond, is a 10th grader at Milwaukie High School and plays in the high school symphonic band and the jazz band.

Rev. Elizabeth led confirmation classes during 2017-2019, including a weekend retreat at the beach in December 2018. Thank you to all those church members who have nurtured our teenagers in their faith development, especially Annie Tarter, Bruce and Judy Bishop, Rev. Amanda Guthrie, Karen Horn, and all who pray for and encourage our youth. Please join us in extending our congratulations to these two amazing teenagers as they celebrate this milestone in their journey of faith! If your youth (6th grader or older) is interested in confirmation classes, please talk to Rev. Janet. Congratulations Confirmands!





# *FACILITATORS AT A GLANCE*

With the new year comes new leaders at First Congregational UCC Portland.  
Get to know your new Core Ministry Facilitators!



## **CHERYL CELVINGER**

Peacemaking Core  
Ministry Facilitator

I grew up in Fresno, California. I went to Fresno State College and transferred to San Francisco State College. I majored in English and minored in art. I met Ron in San Francisco and we were married in 1967. We moved to Portland in 1975. I have two children and 3 grandchildren. My hobbies are reading, knitting, and ceramics.

Contact Cheryl at  
[peacemaking@uccportland.org](mailto:peacemaking@uccportland.org)



## **KAREN HURST**

Hospitality Core  
Ministry Facilitator

Karen is a retired language teacher for whom the classroom and the church have been her primary communities. It is in these places that she sees connections and understandings being built and nurtured in ways that shape both us and the world we inhabit. She volunteers in a sewing/quilting class at the Maybelle Center in Old Town and is honored to facilitate Hospitality this year at First Congregational.

Contact Karen at  
[hospitality@uccportland.org](mailto:hospitality@uccportland.org)



## **MARGARET BALDWIN**

Community Core  
Ministry Facilitator

Margaret Baldwin is retired language teacher living in northeast Portland with her husband, Frank. She has three grown children and three grandchildren. She has been very involved in the nationwide Village movement, helping to establish Northeast Village PDX. Margaret likes to garden, bike, read and knit in her free time. She also loves to sing in the choir at First Congregational UCC - Portland.

Contact Margaret at  
[community@uccportland.org](mailto:community@uccportland.org)

# BEHIND THE DESK OF THE BUSINESS MANAGER

*By Cara Rothe*

The year started out very busy with our work to solidify our 2019 budget and conduct our annual 2018 report. Andre Cordes, our bookkeeper, and I closed the 2018 books and implemented our new budget.

We formed a ground lease committee to begin negotiations with the city to prepare a new contract. I continue to cultivate a relationship with Portland 5's Operations Manager and have attended meetings to help them prepare for their building work in 2019. While the work does not involve the church building, it will impact our office and some of our event logistics.

I am working with Steve Eggers, our facilities manager, on getting an evaluation of our roof as well as receiving bids for potential maintenance. So far, it looks like our roof is in great shape!

I continue work with Jim Sikkle on investigating requirements for our unreinforced masonry building. We are making sure we are up to code based on new city requirements. The good news is that the church has already done a lot of work in the past to address this issue. I will have more news on that front as we move through our investigation.

I am working with Leah Abraham, our communications coordinator, on updating and beautifying our event website. She brings a fresh look and creativity to this process!

It has been a busy quarter with booking events for our space and I have already given several tours to groups who want to have their events in our beautiful sanctuary.

I continue to cultivate my relationship with Chris Aiosa, Executive Director of Do Good Multnomah. We are looking for ways to support Do Good in their effort to create a new outreach program. There are discussions regarding renting some of our office space!

It is exciting to be assisting Rev. Janet Parker with the various transition tasks at hand. We are excited about the next steps forward!



## HAVE YOU MET OUR **COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR** YET?

Meet Leah Abraham, our new communications coordinator! Leah joined staff in November 2018. Before joining the First Congregational UCC family, she worked as a community newspaper journalist in Seattle for over two years. She was born in Texas, grew up in India and moved to Portland nearly 10 years ago.

You can reach Leah at [communications@uccportland.org](mailto:communications@uccportland.org) or 503-946-1041.



# LIFE IN OUR CHURCH

## Getting Acquainted: New Member Breakfast

Have you thought about becoming a member of First Congregational UCC? Have you been attending for a while, but haven't taken the plunge? Or are you new and intrigued by what you are seeing here? We would love to host you for a breakfast gathering to explore membership at First Congregational UCC on February 24, from 8:45 to 10 a.m. at the Church Library.

Come and learn about the history and life of the church and what it means to be part of the United Church of Christ. We want to get to know you better too! Please RSVP to Rev. Janet Parker at [revparker@uccportland.org](mailto:revparker@uccportland.org). And if you would like to explore membership but aren't available on February 24, let Rev. Janet know and another opportunity will be scheduled.



## Will You Volunteer With Our Children?

Can you volunteer once a quarter to spend an hour with our children? We are in need of more volunteers for our Godly Play program on Sunday mornings. Godly Play is a biblical storytelling curriculum that is easy to learn and fun to teach! We especially need "doorkeepers," volunteers who assist the teachers to provide a warm and welcoming presence and keep us in compliance with our "Safe Church" policy. We could also use 1 or 2 more "storytellers" to lead the children in a Godly Play story (script and props provided). We provide training, mentoring and support. Come experience the cherished stories of our faith in a new way! Please see Rev. Janet or Anne Sullivan if you can help.





# Lenten Reflections

AT FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UCC - PORTLAND



WEDNESDAYS, **MARCH 6 - APRIL 10**  
**5:30 P.M. SOUP**  
**6 P.M. MEDITATION/REFLECTION**  
LED BY JANET PARKER & SHELDON HURST

On Wednesday nights throughout the Lenten season we will gather for a bowl of soup and a time of meditation/reflection. We will incorporate the verbal images of DOOR in the Bible, poetry from Iran, and the visual images in the ArtReach Gallery exhibition of photographs by Iranian artist **Ziba Vishteh: *Opening and Closing DOORS IN IRAN.***

Each evening a different image of door will serve as a guide in our spiritual discipline related to personal and social justice concerns. We will reflect, sing, chant, and practice various forms of meditation.

MARCH 6  
**ASH WEDNESDAY'S DOOR**

MARCH 13  
**THE LIFE DOOR**

MARCH 20  
**THE EYE DOOR**

MARCH 27  
**THE EAR DOOR**

APRIL 3  
**THE TRUTH DOOR**

APRIL 10  
**THE GOD DOOR**

## American Sign Language (ASL) comes to First Congregational UCC!

If you've been to our services in the past month, you may have noticed a special addition to our music program. Barbara Bennett has been signing the anthems in worship, providing another way to engage our senses with the music and making our services more inclusive. Barbara signs the anthems "in English," meaning in the order in which the words are sung rather than in deaf conversation form. Barbara began learning ASL after her granddaughter became deaf, and loves sharing her gift with the congregation. Before coming to FCUCC, she signed at First Congregational UCC in Hillsboro, where she holds her membership. But lucky us, soon she will be joining our congregation. Please take a moment to thank Barbara for enhancing our worship service and helping us live into our values of inclusiveness and accessibility for all.



### Womxn's March

There will be a Womxn's March on Sunday, March 3 in the Park Blocks, beginning at 12 p.m. Come one and all to show solidarity for women and their long history of fighting for social justice for all. International Women's Day is Friday, March 8. All members of the family are welcome to join us. We will meet at First Congregational UCC after worship on March 3 to march together.



### Spirituality on Tap for Young(er) Adults

Are you a younger adult/millennial type? If so, you are invited to a new ecumenical venture in "pub theology" that Pastors Janet Parker (First Congregational) and Robyn Hartwig (St. Andrew Lutheran Church) are offering. Once a month, we gather for great Mexican

food, drinks, and amazing conversation on timely topics related to faith and life in today's world. Come and bring a friend! If interested, please RSVP to [revparker@uccportland.org](mailto:revparker@uccportland.org) or at [www.facebook.com/groups/SpiritualityOnTap/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/SpiritualityOnTap/)

Where: Mazatlan Mexican Restaurant, 2050 SW Morrison St. (near Providence Park)  
When: Thursday, Feb. 28th; soft start at 7:30 to order food and drinks; discussion begins at 8:00

#### UPCOMING TOPIC: IS FORGIVENESS A PUBLIC VIRTUE?

Recent revelations about racist politicians and homophobic comedians prompt the question: Is forgiveness a public virtue? Is it appropriate to ask the public to forgive past transgressions that are moral rather than legal in nature? And where does accountability fit into this picture? Come and share your thoughts on what role, if any, forgiveness should play in public and political arenas. Those who RSVP will be sent a brief reading or video clip on the topic in advance.





# JÓHANN VILJÁLMSÓN

FROM ICELAND

Reading Asemic Writing

MARCH 3 - APRIL 28, 2019

## ***CURATOR'S EVENT***

Learning to Read and Write Again

Led by Dr. Sheldon Hurst

Saturday, March 9, 10 - Noon

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## ZIBA VISHTEH

Opening & Closing  
**DOORS IN IRAN**

MARCH 3 - APRIL 28, 2019



### **Volunteering Opportunity**

The Portland People's Outreach Project, or PPOP, is an all-volunteer organization in Portland that provides clean syringes, Naloxone (Narcan), and other harm reduction supplies directly to users. PPOP is always looking for more people to get involved. If you would like to learn more about the program and volunteer, email [ppop@peoplesharmreductionalliance.org](mailto:ppop@peoplesharmreductionalliance.org).

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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*Follow us on social media for event updates, news of our spiritual community,  
and more. Find us on instagram, twitter and facebook (@uccportland)*