



CENTRAL NEWS

Apr 2023

Vol. 31, No. 8

From Rebecca

Dear Friends, Easter Arrives! And here is an Easter perspective for us all.

God, thanks for all "hellos."

The hello of morning sunshine through a window.

The hello of a friend's recognizing eyes.

The hello of a child's tentative smile that almost says we might be friends.

And, God, thanks for all "good-byes." Really a shortened "God be with you."

The good-bye of crimson autumn leaves.

The good-bye of laughing snow melting into a brook of spring.

The good-bye of a child becoming grown.

For, God, in Your Holy Presence, is not every "hello" a baptism, and is not every "good-bye" a going on to resurrection? And if birth belongs to baptism, does not death belong to resurrection?

God, help us then to say our "hellos" and our "good-byes" full of faith and hope. One a greeting that trusts our meeting holds the possibilities of Christian love ... and one a leaving-taking that trusts our parting is a giving over of the one loved into the care and company of the One by whom all love has come into life.

Alleluia! He is risen.

In Christ's name and with His love - *Rebecca*

Stories of Faith

Andrew Bayon, founder of The Nature Effect, will be the featured speaker at Central's **2023 Rebecca L. Spencer Series: Stories of Faith**. The event will take place **Sunday, April 16 at 11:30 am**. Andy will speak about "Wisdom, Connections, and Personal Exploration," and engage the audience in a discussion designed to celebrate our own unique contributions to community, as we honor those who have walked before us. The lecture is free and open to the public.

Andrew's travels – from an indigenous temple in the Colombian Mountains to the underwater treasure of the Great Barrier Reef – have taught him the sacredness of life and a deep reverence for our earth. He shares stories from these experiences as an invitation to explore our personal



connections – with the natural world, with one another, and with ourselves and who we know ourselves to be – through a lens of awe and wonder.

Interfaith Eid Al-Fitr

On **Wednesday, April 19, at 6:30 pm**, The Muslim Community of Rhode Island will once again host an Interfaith Celebration for Ramadan and Eid Al-Fitr

Moon-Sighting in Central's Chapel Hall – bringing together people of all faiths and nationalities to celebrate in the spirit of peace, tolerance, and cooperation. There will be food, candy, henna, and much more. The suggested donation is \$5. And everyone is invited!

During Ramadan, no food or drink can be consumed in daylight hours, so it's fitting that the holy Islamic month ends with Eid Al-Fitr, the festival of fast breaking.

Traditionally, Muslims gather together to celebrate with large-scale events and festival food – particularly sweet treats. The Eid Al-Fitr sighting of the crescent new moon marks the official end of Ramadan.

For more information, contact Saira Husain at 401-405-6482.



APR EVENTS

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|-----------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | Spring Clean-up | 9 am |
| | Easter Egg Decorating | 10 am |
| 2 | Adult Sunday School | 9 am |
| | Palm Sunday Procession | 10:10 am |
| | Palm Sunday Worship | 10:30 am |
| | Church School | 10:30 am |
| | NEOS | 11:30 am |
| | Women Gather | 11:45 am |
| | C3 @ CCC | 6 pm |
| 5 | Gallery Committee | 9 am |
| 6 | Maundy Thursday | |
| | Potluck Supper | 6 pm |
| | Service of Tenebrae | 7 pm |
| 7 | Easter Exploration | 11:30 am |
| | Good Friday Service | 12 noon |
| 8 | WORD | 12 noon |
| | Easter Vigil | 7 pm |
| 9 | Easter Sunrise Celebration | 6 am |
| | Easter Breakfast | 9 am |
| | Easter Egg Hunt | 9:45 am |
| | Easter Worship | 10:30 am |
| 11 | Nominating Committee | 10 am |
| | Mission Trip Meeting | 7 pm |
| 13 | Board of Deacons | 5:30 pm |
| | Food for Thought Book Group | 7 pm |
| 14 | Memorial Courtyard Committee | 3 pm |
| 16 | Adult Sunday School | 9 am |
| | Worship / Scout Sunday | 10:30 am |
| | Church School | 10:30 am |
| | Stories of Faith | 11:30 am |
| | C3 @ CCC | 6 pm |
| 18 | Plant & Properties Committee | 5:45 pm |
| | Prudential Committee | 7 pm |
| 19 | Board of Trustees | 4 pm |
| | Interfaith Eid Al-Fitr | 6:30 pm |
| 20 | Central Men's Group | 7:30 am |
| 22 | Sensational Science | 10 am |
| 23 | Adult Sunday School | 9 am |
| | Worship | 10:30 am |
| | Church School | 10:30 am |
| | Confirmation Class | 11:45 am |
| | C3 @ CCC | 6 pm |
| 24 | Technology Committee | 7 pm |
| 26 | Inquirers' Meeting | 7 pm |
| 27 | Rebecca's Book Group | 12:30 pm |
| 29 | WORD | 11:45 am |
| 30 | Worship | 10:30 am |
| | Church School | 10:30 am |
| | Membership Committee | 11:30 am |

HOLY WEEK BEGINS APRIL 2 • COME WORSHIP WITH US!



The Deacon's Bench

As an adult, I began attending church regularly when I was 50. I'm not sure exactly why I was drawn then to return to the UCC, the denomination I grew up attending. In our society, the milestone of turning 50 is surrounded by dark jokes about the end of life. I actually did not feel all that old though, but I did feel somewhat lonely, and I knew I needed to enrich my spiritual life. I had seen friends and family thriving in their church communities, and I determined to find a community where I could both receive and give.

I loved Central from the first service I attended. I worried, though, that my faith was not developed fully enough for me to offer much back to the church, and I knew that contributing would help me feel as if I belonged. Still, I felt rather than knew that I was in the right place, and that was a new sensation for me. I stayed, hoping my faith could grow, even starting at the ripe old age of 50.

These thoughts came back to me during worship on March 19 as we sang "Amazing Grace." That hymn has never been a favorite of mine. It is usually sung in unison, and I like singing the alto part. (A silly reason, I know.) Plus, the words feel heavy. The speaker, John Newton, calls himself a "wretch." In the past, I'd only heard the speaker protesting his unworthiness. Today, though, I heard his gratitude that God offers unconditional acceptance. No one is too wretched or too old to receive God's love.

I also realized that the Lenten scriptures I've heard this season have resonated with new meaning for me. The story of the woman at the well from John 4 also features someone protesting unworthiness, or at least surprise, that Jesus would accept water from her – a Samaritan woman. He offers her living water, water available to all through his teachings.

I need not have worried that I was too old, nor that my faith was not fully formed. Indeed, I believe I receive more of Christ's love because I am still exploring the meaning of his Word. I just need to listen with openness to hear new messages from familiar scripture and the hymns they inspire. - *Lucy Hanna*

Seeking a Church Home?

If you are looking for a church – or know someone who is – we would love to talk with you about it at our Inquirers' Meeting. It's very informal. You'll meet with our senior minister, Rebecca Spencer, and others like you who think Central may be the right church home. No commitment necessary. To join us, fill out a pew card during Sunday Worship or call the Church Office at 401-331-1960, and Rebecca will get in touch.

Inquirers' Meeting

Wednesday, April 26, 7 pm

Faith Exploration

Tuesday, May 2, 7 pm

New Member Sunday

Sunday, May 7, 10:30 am

Memorial Easter Flowers

There is still time to remember your loved ones this Easter with Memorial Flowers: lilies, tulips, daffodils, and hyacinths. The suggested donation is \$40 each. Following Easter worship, the Deacons, Calling Committee, and Flower Committee will deliver the flowers to Central members who are homebound or have lost loved ones this year. (Only remembrances received by Monday, Mar.27, at 12 noon can be included in the Holy Week and Easter Sunday orders of worship.)

Spring Clean-up

It's time to get Central's building and grounds in top shape for Holy Week! Projects range from polishing and dusting to raking leaves and moving furniture. Choose the task you want to tackle. Many hands not only make light work, they also strengthen our community and deepen friendships. And when you arrive, there will be coffee, doughnuts, and plenty of good cheer! **Saturday, Apr. 1, 9 am to 12 noon** – or whenever you can stop by.

One Egg a Day

On Palm Sunday, Central children will once again lead a special offering for the Egg-a-Day Child Nutrition Program in Haiti. Last year, a \$60 contribution provided a child with one egg every day for an entire year! Just pick up a plastic egg as you enter the sanctuary and return it with your donation inside.

This program – started by the Haiti Task Force of the Southern New England Conference of the UCC – combats malnutrition, provides employment, and teaches job skills. By taking part in this mission, our church schoolers learn about child hunger and how they can take tangible steps to love and care for others.

Minister Search

Many thanks to the nearly 200 members and friends of Central who took time to complete our recent Senior Minister Search survey. The search committee held a debriefing on Sunday, Mar. 26, after coffee hour, to share and discuss survey results.

The raw data showed the depth of love and commitment to Central. While most people are not unhappy with the status quo, they recognize the need for the church to grow and change as we move forward. Top concerns include membership growth, attrition, and retention; the CCC Youth program; and worship and mission focused on faith rather than politics.

If you are interested in reviewing the Senior Minister Search survey results more closely, simply request the PowerPoint presentation from the Church Office.

Mark McLaughlin, search committee chair, said that survey data will be turned over to the UCC and the Slingshot Group (SG). Central has engaged SG – an organization specializing in church staffing and nonprofit executive placement – to assist in the senior minister search. **Our search consultant, Mike Goldsworthy, will visit Central on Sunday, Apr. 23.** He will spend the day with us and hold an open forum after Worship. Stay tuned for details.

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact Mark (mclaughlin@providencecountryday.org) or other members of the search committee. They are available in Chapel Hall after worship, as well as by email and telephone.

Your Annual Pledge

The Stewardship Committee would like to thank the more than 100 members and families who have made their financial pledges to Central for 2023/24.

If you haven't yet made a pledge, we need you to do so. Pledges are the financial foundation of our church, our most important source of funding. Your pledge enables us to create a viable budget, determining what we can accomplish as a church.

It allows our Choir, masterfully led by Patrick, to thrive – as well as our church school, youth and young-adult groups. It enables us to support mission partners like Amos House, Crossroads Rhode Island, and Rhode Island Food Bank. It ensures that Rebecca will continue to inspire us through her thoughtful sermons and that Claudia can continue to bring our congregation together through a multitude of uplifting groups and classes.

Please prayerfully consider what you can give to Central. Bring or mail your pledge card to the church office, or go to Central's website – www.centralchurch.us – and click on the "Give" button.

Thank you for pledging!

In Memoriam

Our prayers and sympathy are with Elizabeth Roberts and family on the death of her mother Ginny Fletcher.
Requiescat in pace.

From Claudia

On this first day of spring, I am rejoicing in the signs of new life all around us. My hyacinths are ready to bloom next to the porch steps. And, I noticed forsythias turning yellow on my way to South County yesterday. Our doves have returned. So have the starlings, but that's another story! All nature is rejoicing, and that is the harbinger of more new life to come.

Our eldest son and family caught an eastern bluebird on their outdoor camera the other day. It flew by a couple of times and then approached the camera and looked directly into the lens for several seconds. Maybe it was thinking, "That's a weird looking bird!" Bluebirds are considered symbols of joy and hope. As we approach the joy and hope of Easter, seeing one in that video seems right and fitting to me.

Soon it will be Palm Sunday and then Easter – and we will rejoice and give thanks once again. The cycle of new life continues even during the dark days of Holy Week in our worship of the Christ, who could not be contained in the darkness of the tomb. As Easter Saturday and Easter Sunday arrive, we remember and we celebrate and rejoice that we worship the One who came to bring us good news and great joy in the Resurrection.

First however, we move through Holy Week with the wonder of Palm Sunday and Jesus' triumphal ride into Jerusalem. Then on to the solemnity of Maundy Thursday and Jesus' arrest and betrayal by one of his closest associates, culminating in his crucifixion on Good Friday. By Holy Saturday our Easter Vigil reminds us that the light of Christ cannot be extinguished. And on Easter morning, we greet the newly resurrected life that Christ brings to us all with flowers and trumpets and our sung and spoken Alleluias!

Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life...." And, it is so!

Yours in Easter joy - *Claudia*

Holy Week at Central



Sunday April 2 **Palm Sunday:** To remember Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem, Central children – with palm fronds and donkey in tow – will lead the congregation on a joyous procession. **10:10 am: Outside on Diman Place**

Thursday April 6 **Maundy Thursday Service of Tenebrae:** This solemn, contemplative service recalls the Last Supper through scripture and a cappella music, ending in quiet and total darkness. Communion will be served. **6 pm: Potluck Supper; 7 pm: Sanctuary**

Friday April 7 **Good Friday Service of Music:** We remember Jesus' death on the cross with Bob Chilcott's "St. John Passion" performed by the Central Congregational Church Choir, directed by Patrick Aiken. **12 noon: Sanctuary**

Saturday April 8 **Easter Vigil:** This meditative, candlelit service – lasting about 45 minutes – includes services of the light, the Word, baptism, and communion. **7 pm: West Lawn** (Wilson Chapel, in case of inclement weather)

Sunday April 9 **Easter Sunrise Service:** This celebratory ecumenical service will be held at daybreak. **6 am: Swan Point Cemetery**

Easter Breakfast: Before Worship, the Central church family will gather for breakfast prepared by CCC Youth. \$5 per person; \$25 per family. Funds raised benefit the summer mission trip. **9 am: Chapel Hall**

Easter Egg Hunt: The hunt, planned by NEOS and held out on the West Lawn, is for children fifth grade and under. **9:45 am: Fireplace Room**

Easter Festival Service of Worship: This joyful, music-filled service – our choir accompanied by organ, brass and timpani – reaches mind and heart to acknowledge the faith that is so much greater than ourselves. **10:10 am: Preludes, 10:30 am: Worship**

Adult Sunday School

This month we will examine the Dead Sea Scrolls. The first were discovered hidden in caves more than 70 years ago. The most recent discovery was in 2021. Scholars continue to search for new scrolls and debate who hid them and why. If you have questions, contact Claudia. **Sundays, Apr. 2, 16, and 23; 9 am, in the Fireplace Room**

C3 @ CCC

Central has a new group for young adults in college through their early thirties called Conversation, Contemplation, and Christ ... aka C3. We'll meet virtually – so you can join from wherever you may be – to talk about faith, the intersection of current events and our beliefs, living as a Christian, and whatever else is on your mind. **Sundays, 6 pm, via Zoom.** Contact Judy for an invitation.



Food for Thought Book Group

This month Claudia's book group will discuss "The Midnight Library," by Matt Haig – a New York Times best-seller. It is "a novel about all the choices that go into a life well lived." Questions? Contact Claudia. **Thursday, Apr. 13, 7 pm, in the Fireplace Room**

Women Gather

Central's women's fellowship group will screen "Babette's Feast," a remarkable story of a gift of love, while enjoying a soup and bread lunch. [1987, 103 minutes, color, rated G] Questions? Ask Claudia. **Sunday, Apr. 2, 11:45 am, in the Fireplace Room**

Scout Sunday

Every year, Scout Troop 28 – which is sponsored by Central – says "thank you" by hosting an ice cream social during coffee hour. It's a Sunday for sundaes. Don't miss it! **Sunday, Apr. 16, 11:30 am, in Chapel Hall**

Central Men's Group

Open to all ages, Central Men's Group is a monthly breakfast gathering – held on the third Thursday of each month – for fellowship and spirited conversation on topics ranging from current events and ethics to trends and shared experiences. Questions? Contact John Trevor. **Thursday, Apr. 20, 7:30 am, in the Fireplace Room**

Rebecca's Book Group

This month, we'll discuss "The Satanic Verses" by Salman Rushdie, which sparked some controversy when it was first published in 1988. Inspired by the life of the Islamic prophet Muhammad, Rushdie used magical realism and relied on contemporary events and people to create his characters and story. **Thursday, Apr. 27, 12:30 pm, via Zoom.** Contact Rebecca for a Zoom invitation.

Children and Spirituality

I'm amazed to think how quickly we are coming to our most holy season. Easter is the event on which our faith is grounded. The first Easter changed everything: how we relate to God and each other, how we understand life and death, how we understand Jesus' teaching. Easter gives us a deep, unchanging hope in every aspect of our lives. Because of Easter, we "get" life in a whole different way.

As important as Easter is to our faith, it can be difficult to discuss with children. Often people do not feel "qualified" to talk about this important event; it can seem overwhelming. For many, Easter focuses on topics we prefer to avoid: betraying trust, saying goodbye, losing loved ones, acknowledging human cruelty. The week before Jesus' resurrection shows people at their worst. Who wants to talk about this with children?

But this is the foundation of our faith. We must share it with our children. Here are some suggestions. Think of Easter discussions as two people coming together, looking for meaning. Neither of you have all the answers. You shouldn't have them. Together however, you can think and wonder and explore these most important concepts. Be ready and open to questions. Be honest. Focus on what happened after Jesus died: the resurrection. This gives us "good news" ideas to hold onto. Even in the worst of endings, there is always the hope of a new beginning. As awful as humans can act, God does not leave us. God is always there, waiting for us to turn towards God and the path of Jesus.

This goes for younger children as well. Wonder together. Deal with difficult incidents by simply sharing the facts. Yes, they are hard to hear and, yes, they happened – but they are not the focus. The good news of Easter should always be the focus.

The church school library has recently added two wonderful Easter picture books that do just that. "A Very Happy Easter" by Tim Thornborough – for children ages two to four – tells the story very simply, focusing on the disciples and their emotions. In "The Best Story about Jesus" by Sheila S. Coleman – for slightly older children – an old shepherd tells the Easter story, and we see a young shepherd's reactions to the various events.

Peace and blessings - *Judy*

The Gallery

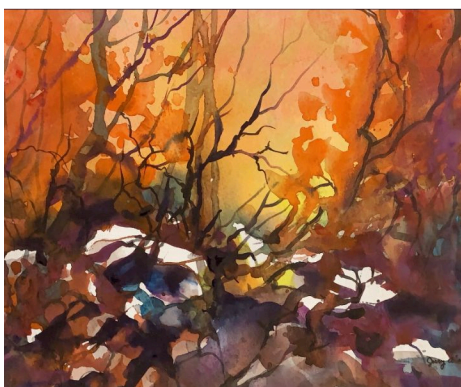


On April 5, Central's Gallery will debut the work of **watercolor artist Jerry Aissis**.

Jerry started his journey into the world of watercolor after

retiring from 33 years of teaching high school biology. He signed up for workshops at the Rhode Island Watercolor Society, studying with Al Albrekston. Soon he started developing the style and technique reflected in his paintings, adding both oils and acrylics to his repertoire. Jerry's is a "loose" approach that avoids too much detail. Bright, bold, warm colors are his passion – and dominate most of his work. Landscapes and seascapes are frequent themes that capture his love of the natural world.

Jerry tries to paint every day or at least do something art-related, even if it is just reading an art magazine or book. He is a firm believer: "There is inspiration all around you. Never stop looking. Never stop painting."



Technology Update

Did you know that there is a complete **Membership Directory** on Central's website? Access the directory via the "Members Only" link on the "Home" menu. The first time you click on this link, you must fill out a registration form. Once the church has reviewed the form and your membership is confirmed, you will receive an email granting access. Thereafter, just log in to the "Members Only" section with your email and password.

The listings are searchable. There is even a way to save these listings to your Outlook or Apple contact list. And we've provided a form where you can make edits or changes to your directory listing.

You can also **fulfill your pledge online**. Just log on to the Central website and go to "Give" to learn about payment options.

Donate right on the website – by clicking on the "Give to Central" button. You can also download the Tithe.ly app using the Apple App Store or Google Play links provided. Please remember, Tithe.ly retains a small percentage of each payment. You can opt to cover this cost yourself. But if not, Central actually prefers donations made by traditional check and cash. And, of course, if you are already using your bank's online system to fulfill your pledge, there is no reason to change.

If you have questions or feedback, please contact the Technology Committee so we can continually improve these options.

Easter Egg Decorating

Once again we're decorating eggs in memory of Ann Bliven, whose special technique makes Easter eggs durable enough to use year after year. We'll provide supplies. You bring a dozen or more blown-out eggs. Paint up a storm – or just come and watch. And, in memory of Ann, who was always giving to others, please bring some "kids' food" for Camp Street Ministries. **Saturday, Apr. 1, 10 am to 1 pm, in Chapel Hall**

NEOS

Central middle schoolers will gather after worship to fill the Easter eggs for the Easter Egg Hunt. There will be plenty of candy, so it's okay if a few pieces go "missing."

Sunday, Apr. 2, 11:30 am, in the Deacons' Room The next week, NEOS will hide the Easter eggs on the West Lawn – and then stay to help younger children during the Easter Egg Hunt. **Sunday, Apr. 9, 9:30 am, in the Fireplace Room**

Easter Exploration

This Good Friday event looks at the various incidents that occurred before the first Easter. It is a wonderful opportunity for children of church school age to gain a better understanding of Holy Week (and ideal childcare for parents who want to attend the Good Friday Service of Music). **Friday, Apr. 7, 11:30 am to 1:30 pm, in the Church School Wing**

Easter Breakfast Setup

WORD and Central eighth graders, will meet to set up for Easter Breakfast. **Saturday, Apr. 8, 12 noon, in Chapel Hall**

Mission Trip Meeting

CCC youth, parents, and any other adults interested in this summer's mission trip should plan on attending this virtual meeting. Learn about all aspects of the mission trip, and bring your questions!

Tuesday, Apr. 11, 7 pm, via Zoom. Contact Judy for an invitation.

Sensational Science

Join us as we explore science in this wonderful world God has made. This event is for younger elementary school children – but open to those through fifth grade – who are curious and love trying new things.

Saturday, Apr. 22, 10 am, in Chapel Hall

Earth Day

Central's church schoolers as well as CCC Youth will recognize Earth Day on **Sunday, Apr. 23**. The official theme for 2023 is Invest In Our Planet.

WORD

Central high schoolers will explore BaseStation AR, entering worlds and challenges not available in our everyday existence. The cost is \$40. Join us on **Saturday, Apr. 29, 11:45 am, in the Fireplace Room**

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