



# CENTRAL NEWS

Aug 2023

Vol. 31, No. 11

## From Rebecca

Dear Centralites and friends, I hope your summertime has been filled with love and grace abounding. As I have been weeding and tending cows, I've been listening to podcasts of the presidential candidates ... as many as I can find!

While there are many with mixed feelings about Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., most of us can relate to his feelings of loss, when we share that question of why do bad things happen to good people if there is a God who cares about each and every one of us. Kennedy, who has lived through more than a few tragedies, beginning with the murder of his father when he was 14, said he once asked his mother, "When a loved one dies, does that hole in your heart ever disappear?" His mother's answer? It never diminishes, but you can grow bigger to fill in the edges in ways that honor the loved one.

From the other side of the political spectrum, many of us can relate to Nikki Haley's feelings of being marginalized. Her father, an Indian immigrant, wore a turban, and as a little girl, she was made fun of on the school playground. Her mother's advice? What is important is not to show how you are different but to share how you are the same.

It seems to me that while each of us is certainly unique as one of God's beloved creatures, we all need to better understand the other. We may have very different views of life and lived through different difficult times, but the significant issue is how we learn to understand those differences and work together for the good of all.

Having just preached on the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13) at Second Church in Greenwich, Conn., I've been pondering the meaning of this. And it strikes me that we tend to understand this parable as a story of our successes or our failures. Are we thriving seeds – or are we surrounded by weeds and pricklers, malnourished by rocky soil or drought, or ready to bear fruit and good yields? But it is the Parable of the Sower, not the seeds! And Jesus' point here, speaking from that boat offshore, is that God's extravagance is what is important as well as what is so hard for us to understand. We do not know how God works, but God just keeps sowing seeds, generously. God's grace is so abundant among us, we sometimes can be blind to it.

So, as I watch the cows share their grass, and as I see them exclude one of their own, I resolve to look ever more closely for God's grace among us, loving each of us so incredibly much now and always ... no matter where we fall. I hope as fellow followers of Jesus, you will join me in finding God's grace wherever you may find yourself.

Happy August to you and your dear ones - *Rebecca*

## AUG EVENTS

<b>2</b>	Amos House Volunteers	6:30 am
<b>6</b>	Summer Bible Study	9 am
	Worship	10 am
	Church School	10 am
	Wedding: Frances Munro and Bob Stout	11 am
<b>9</b>	Amos House Volunteers	6:30 am
<b>10</b>	Food for Thought Book Group	7 pm
<b>13</b>	Summer Bible Study	9 am
	Worship	10 am
	Church School	10 am
<b>16</b>	Amos House Volunteers	6:30 am
<b>17</b>	Central Men's Group	7:30 am
<b>18</b>	Newsletter Deadline	3:30 pm
<b>20</b>	Summer Bible Study	9 am
	Worship	10 am
	Church School	10 am
	Lunch at Aleppo Sweets	11:30 am
<b>23</b>	Amos House Volunteers	6:30 am
<b>27</b>	Summer Bible Study	9 am
	Worship	10 am
	Church School	10 am
<b>30</b>	Amos House Volunteers	6:30 am

*The Church Office will be open from 9 am to 4 pm throughout the month of August.*



*The Church Office will be closed on Monday, August 14 for Victory Day.*

## Children's Musical



**"Once Upon a Parable"**  
June 11, 2023

**JOIN US FOR SUMMER WORSHIP AT 10 AM!**



## 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

Tuesday, October 24, 7 pm

### Faith Exploration

Wednesday, November 1, 7 pm

### New Member Sunday

Sunday, November 5, 10:30 am

## UCC Summer Picnic

The entire Central congregation is invited to the Second Annual Rhode Island Association UCC Summer Picnic! There will be music and games for the whole family. And, the Rhode Island Association will provide dessert, water, and lemonade.

If you like, bring a picnic lunch or snacks. Picnic tables are available, though you may want to bring blankets and lawn chairs. RSVP online to [tiny.cc/riuccpicnic/](http://tiny.cc/riuccpicnic/). **Sunday, Aug. 20, 3 to 5 pm, at Colt State Park – Picnic Site 24** (Route 114, Bristol, R.I.)

## The Sacrament of Baptism

Baptism is the beginning of Christian faith and life – and a vital part of our worship together. If you would like to be included in this celebration of love and acceptance into the care of Christ's church, please speak to the Reverend Rebecca Spencer. We will be offering Baptisms on **Sunday, Sep. 17, 10:30 am**.

There will be a gathering for those wishing to be baptized – date TBD – in the Fireplace Room.



## Hats off to Daniel Rogers!

Thanks to the generosity of so many Central members and others in our community, Scout Troop 28 – led by Eagle Scout Daniel Rogers – assembled more than 200 hot-weather kits for unhoused people in Providence. They distributed the kits in early June – once again proving that “Kindness Matters.”

## The Deacon's Bench

When I heard on NPR that Rabbi Harold Kushner died in April, I remembered having read his well-known book “When Bad Things Happen to Good People” during a rough time in my own life. I was curious about his other publications and discovered that he had written a book about Psalm 23. I learned to recite this psalm in Sunday school and also sang a version of it in junior choir. For me it is a familiar and comforting friend – as it is for many.

I rustled up a copy of Kushner's book and began to read his verse-by-verse commentary. Because I am an inveterate hiker, the bit having to do with “the paths” was most intriguing to me. The translation I am accustomed to (King James Version) puts it this way:

*[H]e leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.*

As a child I didn't have a clue what “righteousness” meant, and I'm not sure that situation has improved much in adulthood. In the translation Kushner uses (Jewish Publication Society of America version, I think), the verse goes like this:

*He guides me in straight paths for His name's sake.*

Okay, I thought. A “straight path” is something a hiker can relate to more easily than the “paths of righteousness.” But of course there is more to the story, as I should have suspected when it's a question of translation of ancient texts. Kushner writes that the Hebrew phrase rendered in English as “straight paths” actually means “roundabout ways that end up in the right direction.”

I like this way of looking at the passage. Whether we are taking the longer but more scenic route on a hiking trail, or fumbling our way toward faith through fear and doubt, let us seek out the “straight paths.” - *Gretchen Yealy*

## Minister Search

On Sunday, July 16, Mark McLaughlin, chair of the Senior Minister Search Committee, announced that the pace of the search has begun to accelerate.

Mike Goldsworthy, Central's search consultant, recently presented five candidates to the search committee. Members are currently conducting introductory phone interviews with these candidates to learn more about them and assess their potential fit with Central. Then they will trim the list of candidates and conduct video interviews involving the entire committee. This should unfold over the next several weeks.

The goal is to identify a dynamic leader, one who will help Central navigate the future and address the congregation's priorities:

- Pastoral excellence in and outside of the pulpit;
- Membership engagement and growth;
- Revived education and youth programs;
- Central's robust music tradition; and
- Consensus-based leadership – within and outside of our church community.

Many thanks to Central's dedicated search committee members, who have devoted considerable time to this effort: Tracy Baran, Barry Bayon, Rob Edwards, Mike Hopkins, Caroline Hunter, Larry Kellam, Janice Libby, Torin Mathieu, Charley Rardin, Elizabeth Roberts, Temi Sonubi, Tom Viall, and Mark McLaughlin, chair. Please do not hesitate to reach out to Mark ([mclaughlin@providence-countryday.org](mailto:mclaughlin@providence-countryday.org) / 401-226-1391) or the other committee members if you have any questions or feedback.

## Poetry Corner

### Summer Prayer

On the shore of a lake,  
I find a skipping stone,  
hold it close – as though  
it's holy – then breathing  
a prayer, send it out.

I'm no longer in control,  
but as it skims across,  
I watch how it touches  
the water's top – rising  
again and again.

What moves it on; what  
power lifts its heaviness?

It travels farther than I had hoped,  
then disappears from human sight.  
For moments I stand in silence.  
Ripples remain – then widen.

- *Ginny Bradley*

### In Memoriam

Our prayers and sympathy are with Jimmy Wrenn and his family – longtime friends of Central Congregational Church – on the death of his wife, Harriet. *Requiescat in pace.*



## From Claudia

As I write this, we have a very special house guest for the week – our seven-year-old grandson. He's attending a summer camp in our town – and rather than him spending hours in the car commuting, we are blessed that he is here with us for the whole week. Joy and bliss all combined in the person of one small child and his dotting grandparents.

It's been a long time since I've made bag lunches or dropped anyone off at camp first thing in the morning. But, it comes right back. And, seeing the world through a child's eyes is such a gift. Holding a small hand and connecting with children is a slice of heaven. Listening to the events of their day is nothing short of a wonder.

Henry Ward Beecher said that "children are the hands by which we take hold of heaven." There is nothing better than seeing the world through the fresh eyes of a child. There is nothing better than hearing their prayers for those whom they love and for the world they inhabit.

The simplest joys and sorrows are filtered through their hearts, and we have much to learn from them. The children I have known have taught me many valuable lessons about how to live my own life. Perhaps the most valuable lesson of all is how to enjoy the smaller pleasures of life.

Slowing down to their speed and stooping to their eye level lets me see things I might otherwise have missed. Perhaps it might be the adventures of visiting two kittens, a cookout with old friends, the joys of Legos, using newfound swimming skills, or reading aloud. Learning and living and growing are moments too precious to miss no matter what our ages.

May you see the world with the eyes of a child this summer. May you remember when summer seemed filled with endless possibilities. May your blessings be as many as the grains of sand on the shore or the stars in the heavens. And, may these warm, summery days fill you with heavenly moments.

Yours in hope and love - *Claudia*



*Not Just Supper* congratulates Frances Munro and Bob Stout on their upcoming nuptials. Both long-term members of Central, Frances and Bob were merely acquaintances when they joined *Not Just Supper*, Central's social group for singles. The rest, as they say, is history. Best wishes, you two! May the years ahead be filled with love and happiness.

## SAVE THE DATE

Sunday • September 10 • 10:30 am

### Gathering Sunday

*We'll kick off a new year of  
Worship and Fellowship!*

## Summer Bible Study



This summer we're exploring The Gospel of Mark – taking on a different topic each week.

Come to one session or all of them. Contact Claudia for more information.

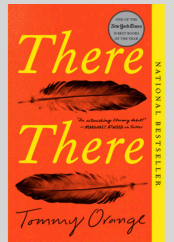
**Sundays, 9 am, in the Fireplace Room**

- Aug. 6: Teachings and Parables to Those Eager to Hear
- Aug. 13: Teachings and Parables to Those Who Opposed Jesus
- Aug. 20: Jesus' Passion and Crucifixion
- Aug. 27: Jesus' Burial and Resurrection

## Food for Thought Book Group

Join us for a lively discussion about "There There," by Tommy Orange. This wondrous and shattering novel follows twelve people from Native communities traveling to the Big Oakland Powwow and their surprising connections. **Thursday, Aug. 10, 7 pm, in the Fireplace Room**

**Coming up –**  
"Transcendent Kingdom,"  
by Yah Gyasi: **Thursday, Sep. 14, 7 pm**



## Women Gather

Central's women's fellowship group is invited to attend the wedding of one of its own. Frances Munro will marry Bob Stout immediately following Worship on **Sunday, Aug. 6, 11 am, in the Sanctuary**. Please stay after for a reception in Chapel Hall.

**Our next meeting** will be Sunday, Sep. 10, at 11:30 am.

## 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, Aug. 17, 7:30 am, in the Fireplace Room**

## Lunch at Aleppo Sweets

Join Central friends after Worship for an authentic Syrian repast. Check out the café menu ([www.alepposweets.com/cafe-menu](http://www.alepposweets.com/cafe-menu)). And, don't forget to save room for the baklava! Please RSVP to Claudia. **Sunday, Aug. 20, 11:30 am at Aleppo Sweets** (107 Ives Street, Providence)

ALEPPO  SWEETS



## A Sunday Morning in the Choir Loft

We get to the church earlier than most everyone else – usually between 9 and 9:15 am. We climb up to the loft (those stairs are tricky!) and sit in our seats for the next hour to warm up and practice. Usually we have four to six pieces of music to perform, so there is a lot of paper shuffling, and serious attention must be paid to our beloved director, Patrick!

Once we are released for a 15-minute break, we hustle to get our robes on. These are the same robes we have been wearing for at least 20 years. Since I've been there anyway. We wash our own robes, if needed, and usually in the summer take them home to do so.

During the break, many of us go downstairs to the kitchen where Patrick has made us coffee and often baked something for us to eat. (Did I say he was amazing?) We see a few people, mostly rushing around with their own routines, before the service.

By 10:25 am we are back in the loft, and the service starts. We sit quietly through Patrick's beautiful prelude; we stand and sing the introit. Then, we are off to the races: juggling music and hymnals (sometimes the music is in the bulletin – that is a blessing!), paying attention to Patrick's sit / stand instructions, focusing on the next piece of music, sitting to figure out the next thing.... And repeat. As the worship service ends, we sing the benediction and then sit to enjoy Patrick's thrilling postlude!

Now it's 11:45. We turn in our music in an orderly fashion so it can be filed for later use. Then we change out of our robes, gather our belongings, and head down those stairs.

By this time, most of the sanctuary is quiet and empty. The last few people are greeting the ministers at the front door. If we have the energy or need, we can make our way to Chapel Hall for a quick sip of coffee, a cookie, and a "hi" to those who are lingering.

Given our Sunday morning schedule, it is rare that we get to meet up with or get to know other church members. It's hard to feel part of the congregation as a whole when you are acting on this level of commitment. So we definitely appreciate when people acknowledge our contribution to the service – or if they just say hello and chat for a couple seconds.

We've come through the pandemic stronger as a choir. We sang through masks for a long time – for rehearsals and services – spatially distanced with the doors open and the cold wind blowing through. Early on during the shutdown, we learned music on our own and recorded our tracks to create "virtual choir" experiences. It was hard work, let me just say.

But we love doing this for the church. We love music. We love to sing. And we so appreciate that Central gives us the opportunity to participate in this amazing choir.

- Barbara Silvas

### In the Gallery

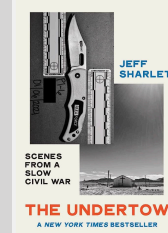
The Gallery will continue to showcase the work of abstract artist Gail Esposito – in a show entitled "The Art of Color" – through Sep. 5. In September, we'll debut the work of **Marjorie Ball**, whose representational oil paintings have an aura of mystery and a dreamlike quality that evokes memory. *Shown here: Mobegan Morning III by Marjorie Ball.*



### Brunch/Lunch at Caspian Sea

Celebrate Labor Day weekend with friends over authentic Mediterranean cuisine as well as classic brunch fare. Check out the menu at this Fox Point eatery (<https://caspian-wickenden.com/menu/>) and RSVP to Claudia. **Sunday, Sep. 3, 11:30 am at Caspian Sea** (239 Wickenden Street)

### Rebecca's Book Group



The next meeting of Rebecca's Book Group will be in September, when we'll discuss "The Undertow: Scenes from a Slow Civil War," by Jeff Sharlet. This "guide" to the religious dimensions

of American politics is a necessary reckoning with our precarious present that brings to light a decade of American failures, as well as a vision for American possibility. **Thursday, Sep. 28, 12:30 pm, on the West Lawn.**

## Summer at Central



### Central Congregational Church

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