



CENTRAL NEWS

Feb 2024

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A Good Word From Patrick



This year, Ash Wednesday falls on Valentine's Day. Both of these days, separate from one another, are worth exploring. Together, they highlight a beautiful tension in our lives – the pursuit of love, joy, and connection, and the reminder that our lives and the foundations we build them on are fleeting.

Valentine's Day, as we know it, has a complicated and mysterious history. Valentinus, a priest, was martyred on Feb. 14, 269, for trying to evangelize Emperor Claudius of Rome. The legends around his arrest and death have grown

to mythic proportions as we've tried to make sense of his connection to chocolate, heart-shaped notes, and beautiful flower arrangements.

Some legends say he was performing secret weddings in Rome to prevent young men from being conscripted into the army. It's a romantic story, but there doesn't seem to be any evidence that it is true. Some historians have tried to connect Valentinus to the celebration of romance as a successful attempt to supersede the Roman holiday of Lupercalia, which celebrated the coming spring with ritual sacrifices for fertility.

More recently, scholars have credited the 14th-century poet Geoffrey Chaucer for Valentinus' connection to Valentine's Day. With a simple desire to write poetry about the coming spring and a wish to honor a saint with a decent-sounding name, Chaucer wrote "Parlament of Foules" about the pairing off and mating of birds on Valentine's Day, introducing the world to the annual celebration of romance through sheer aesthetics.

Ash Wednesday commemorates the beginning of Lent, by reminding us that our lives are fragile and fleeting, so we might refocus our lives on the things of greatest importance.

The tension here reminds me of a Jewish saying attributed to Reb Simcha Bunem, an 18th-century Hasidic rabbi: "We should hold two slips of paper in our pockets. One should be written, 'The world was created for me,' and the other, 'I am but dust and ashes.'"

Our lives are infinitely valuable to God, our families, our community, our church, and the world. If you were not here, the world would not be what it is. The world was made for you to thrive, to find joy, to find meaning. The world relies on you. Your community relies on you. Your family relies on you. God relies on you. You are an essential and fundamental part of what makes the world good.

And yet, you are just dust and ash. You are just like everyone else. You are made up of the same stuff as any other thing you will encounter today. This can be incredibly freeing. You are made of the same dust that stars are made of. You are made of the same stuff that the old lettuce you forgot about in your fridge is made of.

All of this is good news that puts our lives into perspective. As we look forward to Valentine's Day, Ash Wednesday, and the season of Lent, I invite you to take some time to honor this sacred tension. The world is made for you, and you are but dust and ash. You are a spark of divine energy with the capacity to bring an abundance of love and grace to the world, and you are impermanent. So, what will you do with your wild and precious life?

I look forward to exploring this with you in the next few weeks. - Patrick

Fond Farewell ... and a Quiz!

After a six-month stay in Providence, our friends from the Netherlands – Bart Koopman, Elize Koopman-Verhoeff, and daughter Anne-Sophie – will be returning to their home country. To say goodbye on their last Sunday at Central, Bart and Elize will present an interactive "Netherlands Quiz," providing insights into their home – just as they've learned so much about ours. Pick up ice cream at the Scouts BSA Social and join them **Sunday, Feb. 11, 12 noon, in Chapel Hall.**



FEB EVENTS

1	Board of Deacons	5:45 pm
	Choir Rehearsal	7:30 pm
4	Adult Sunday School	9 am
	Stewardship Committee	9:15 am
	Worship/New Member Sunday	10:30 am
	Church School	10:30 am
	New Member Reception	11:30 pm
	Family & Friends Trivia	12:30 pm
5	Children's Choir Rehearsal	5 pm
6	Tuesdays With Scripture	8 am
7	Amos House Volunteers	6:30 am
	Gallery Committee	9 am
8	Food for Thought Book Group	7 pm
	Choir Rehearsal	7:30 pm
9	Gallery Opening	5 pm
11	Adult Sunday School	9 am
	Worship/Scout Sunday	10:30 am
	Church School	10:30 am
	Scouts BSA Ice Cream Social	11:30 am
	The Netherlands Quiz	12 noon
	Women Gather	12 noon
12	Children's Choir Rehearsal	5 pm
13	Tuesdays With Scripture	8 am
14	Amos House Volunteers	6:30 am
	Ash Wednesday Service	7 pm
15	Central Men's Group	7:30 am
	Choir Rehearsal	7:30 pm
16	Friday Film Fare	7:30 pm
18	Adult Sunday School	9 am
	Worship	10:30 am
	Church School	10:30 am
19	Technology Committee	7 pm
20	Tuesdays With Scripture	8 am
	Newsletter Deadline	3:30 pm
	Plant & Properties Committee	5:45 pm
	Prudential Committee	7 pm
21	Amos House Volunteers	6:30 am
	Lenten Meditation	5:30 pm
	Lenten Mission Supper	6 pm
22	Fourth Thursday Book Group	12:30 pm
	Adult Choir Rehearsal	7:30 pm
25	Adult Sunday School	9 am
	Worship	10:30 am
	Church School	10:30 am
	Membership Committee	11:30 am
	Special Service of Music	4 pm
26	Children's Choir Rehearsal	5 pm
27	Tuesdays With Scripture	8 am
28	Amos House Volunteers	6:30 am
	Lenten Meditation	5:30 pm
	Lenten Mission Supper	6 pm

The Church Office will be closed on Monday, February 19 for Presidents' Day

JOIN US FOR SUNDAY WORSHIP AT 10:30 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, Patrick Faulhaber, 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 Patrick will get in touch.

Inquirers' Meeting

Tuesday, January 23, 7 pm

Faith Exploration

Wednesday, January 31, 7 pm

New Member Sunday

Sunday, February 4, 10:30 am

New Member Sunday / Reception

Join us in welcoming new members to the Central family during Worship and then stay after for a New Member Reception and potluck luncheon in Chapel Hall. See if you can meet all of our new members! The Membership Committee will provide main dishes, but you can enliven the fare by sharing a favorite side dish, casserole, salad, or dessert. **Sunday, Feb. 4, 11:30 am, in Chapel Hall**



Join the Snack Brigade!

Please join the Mission & Action Committee in February's Crossroads Rhode Island Snack Brigade. Sunday is the one day of the week when Crossroads doesn't have food service available for the nearly 200 individuals housed there – as well as others who are there temporarily, awaiting assistance. So Central will be collecting and donating 200 pieces of fruit and 600 individually wrapped snacks to Crossroads every Sunday in February – **Feb. 4, 11, 18, and 25** – to tide them over.

You can sign up to help during coffee hour. Or, for more information, **contact Wendy Abelson** at wendywabelson@gmail.com.



Scout Sunday / Ice Cream Social

Scouting roots grow deep at Central. We are the sponsoring organization for Scouts BSA Troop 28. During the worship service on Scout Sunday, we will recognize our Scouts for their contributions and accomplishments – and then enjoy their hospitality at an ice cream social during coffee hour. **Sunday, Feb. 11, 11:30 am, Chapel Hall**

The Deacon's Bench

I've always felt the first months of the year to be a beautifully quiet time in New England. The joys of Christmas have passed (you've said your byes to the visiting relatives), but so have the stresses that may manifest with the commercialization of this celebration.

I'm sitting at my dinner table looking out the window to the forested area across the street. The trees are bare; I glimpse a few squirrels rustling through the fallen leaves. The number of runners and dog walkers seen on my street has dwindled. From where I sit, it is quiet outside. It's January, and this week the snow and 20-degree temperature quickly came and went, swept away by rain and 50-degree temperatures. And even though a few miles from my house the Blackstone River is still raging like the ocean, from where I sit it is quiet. I only hear the rhythmic breathing of our dog, the soft chewing of pellet food by our pet rabbit, and the sounds of the 14-year-old refrigerator in the other room.

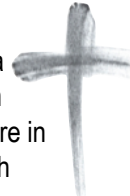
A brief digression: I have mixed feelings about the uses of social media. But as an artist, I do use Instagram and Facebook to record moments of expression, and I enjoy seeing other artists' moments of expression. A trend, especially at the start of a new year, is to challenge oneself to post something new every day for a month. Visual artists post one new sketch a day; musicians post a new song idea each day. I think it's a great way to encourage artistic growth. But I have to be honest. Although I have tried, I have never completed one of these challenges.

But as I sit here looking out my window, I think of another great way to challenge myself and invite you all to join in. Maybe once a day, take a moment to contemplate the quiet beauty in the world, the quiet beauty of the people in the world, the quiet beauty inside of us, and the quiet ways we can encourage others and help each other grow this year.

- Erik Wohlgenuth

Lent Begins

Ash Wednesday: Central's Ash Wednesday worship service is a time for quiet contemplation. On this the first day of Lent, we share in communion, and those who wish receive ashes – an ancient custom that not only marks the beginning of Lent, but also represents a time of repentance and reflection. **Wednesday, Feb. 14, at 7 pm, in the Sanctuary**



Lenten Meditations: Lent is a time for self-reflection and prayer, a chance to draw closer to God. This is the goal of our Lenten Meditations, held every Wednesday in the weeks leading up to Palm Sunday. Each week, a member of Central will share his or her journey of faith. These brief, meditative services let us contemplate our own spiritual paths, share in another's journey, and find connections in common ideas, concerns, questions, and experiences. Perhaps most importantly, we come to know one another in thoughtful and faith-filled ways. **Wednesdays, Feb. 21, 28 and Mar. 6, 13, and 20 – at 5:30 pm, in Wilson Chapel**

Lenten Mission Suppers: Our annual Lenten Mission Supper speaker series immediately follows the Lenten Meditation services. Please stay after for a simple supper and short presentation from one of Central's mission partners every Wednesday during Lent. This year's theme is "poverty." The series will culminate in a group discussion of the book "Poverty, by America" by the Pulitzer Prize-winning, bestselling author Matthew Desmond. **Wednesdays, Feb. 21, 28 and Mar. 6, 13, and 20 – at 6 pm, in the Fireplace Room.**

Stewardship 2024

Thank you to everyone who has honored their pledges for the current fiscal budget and given to Central throughout the year. Your generosity is greatly appreciated!

To celebrate and thank you, the Stewardship Committee invites you to Central's second annual Scavenger Hunt. This is a family-friendly, fun-filled adventure where the entire church is your game board. Clues will lead you through every nook and cranny of the sanctuary, church school, basement, and even the church grounds.

On the way, you'll learn about our place of worship and the wonderful initiatives your pledge helps provide: mission and ministries, upkeep of our historic church building, salaries of our ministers and staff, as well as our inspiring music and fellowship programs. **Sunday, Mar. 3, following Worship, in Chapel Hall.**

As we approach Dedication Sunday on Mar. 17, please know that only half of our \$1 million-plus annual budget comes from your pledge – and thoughtfully consider your donation for the coming year.

For more information about the pledging process and how you can support Central's mission, **contact Jeff Baran, Stewardship Committee co-chair.**



From Claudia

Phillis Wheatley was born in West Africa around 1753. Kidnapped and sold into slavery at the age of seven or eight, she ended up in Boston where John Wheatley, a wealthy merchant, purchased her. She was educated by his children, Mary and Nathaniel. When she was 12, she could read classic Greek and Latin. Her education was unusual for any woman of her time, perhaps most of all because she was enslaved.

She had a tremendous gift for writing poetry, which was encouraged by the Wheatleys. She was only 14 when she wrote her first poem. Her first book of poetry, "Poems of Phillis Wheatley: A Native African and a Slave," was published in England in 1773. She and Nathaniel were sent there by his mother, Susanna, because they believed Phillis would have a better chance to publish it there. It was the first book of poetry published by an African-American woman. Shortly after its publication, she was emancipated by the family.

In a 1774 letter to the Mohegan Native American Presbyterian minister, Samson Occom, Phillis wrote: "In every human Breast, God has implanted a Principle, which we call Love of Freedom; it is impatient of Oppression, and pants for Deliverance."

Love of and compassion for others is part of our identity as Christians. May we remember Jesus' reading of Isaiah 58:6 in the synagogue in Nazareth: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18). If you read further, Jesus infuriated the hometown folks, but that's a story for another time!

Blessings to you and yours - *Claudia*

Musical Notes

On Sunday, Feb. 25, at 4 pm, the Central Congregational Church Choir will present "A Sermon from the Mountain," by Alice Parker (1925 to 2023). This powerful cantata – commissioned shortly after the assassination of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in April 1968 and first performed a year later almost to the day – is a tribute to the slain leader of the nonviolent movement in our country.

Parker brilliantly integrated texts from Dr. King's sermons, articles, and books with the scriptures he often quoted as the basis for his beliefs. Each of the six spiritual- and jazz-inspired movements combines a narrator's words from actual writings and speeches, Biblical passages for soloists, and choral responses using material drawn from and arranged from a wealth of spirituals. Accompanied by string quartet, bass, piano, and drums, the music is sometimes turbulent, sometimes jubilant, sometimes ethereal, and always profound – challenging and inspiring us to work for nonviolence and justice both within and without the walls of our church.

Please join us in celebrating Black History Month as we hear God's word interpreted through music inspired by one of America's greatest spiritual leaders.

SAVE THE DATE

Sunday • March 17 • 10:30 am

Dedication Sunday

Please prayerfully consider your 2024/25 pledge and keep Central alive with worship, music, fellowship, mission, and outreach.

Poetry Corner

Palm Sunday

I smell you God
after the rain.

I tell you God
when I'm in pain.

I hear you cry
see all you love.

Together we fly,
wings of a dove.

- *Jon Wolston*

Get to Know Patrick

Do you remember the last time you started a new job, in a new town, where you barely knew anybody? Minister Emerita Rebecca Spencer does. But 35 years ago, members of the Central congregation made it easier for her by hosting get-togethers in their homes. The Board of Deacons wants to do the same for our new senior minister. After all, Patrick has the difficult task of getting to know all of us!

So we are arranging small gatherings in people's homes where Patrick can have longer conversations, hear stories, share some laughter and get to know us up close and personal. These events – which could be breakfast, mid-morning coffee, lunch, afternoon tea, wine and cheese, or dessert – will begin in February and last into spring, with a break for Lent and Easter.

If you can host, please contact **Beth Cotter** at beth.cotter@gmail.com and let her know your preferred dates and times, as well as the maximum number of people you can accommodate in your home. We are especially in need of hosts that live in or near Providence. Thank you!

Adult Sunday School

"Tell Them We Are Rising" – For Black History Month, we will examine historically black colleges and universities and how they have educated the architects of freedom movements and cultivated leaders in every field. Contact Claudia with any questions. **Sundays, Feb. 4, 11, 18, and 25, at 9 am, in the Fireplace Room**

Tuesdays With Scripture



Our weekly community devotional is back! Every Tuesday morning, we'll discuss a short Bible passage. Each session is self-contained. Come to one or to all of them! Contact Claudia for a Zoom invitation. She'll also send you the reading and questions to consider ahead of time. **Tuesdays, Feb. 6, 13, 20, and 27 – from 8 to 8:45 am, via Zoom**

Food for Thought Book Group

This month, Claudia's book group will discuss "The Last White Man," by Mohsin Hamid, "a story of race and privilege, love and loss, belonging and rediscovery in a time of unsettling change." **Thursday, Feb. 8, 7 pm, in the Fireplace Room**

Women Gather

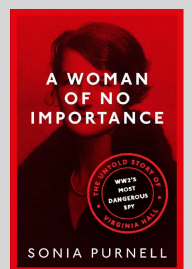
This month, our women's fellowship group will enjoy "The Netherlands Quiz" (see page 1) along with other Centralites. **Sunday, Feb. 11, 12 noon, in Chapel Hall**

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, Feb. 15, 7:30 am, in the Fireplace Room**

Fourth Thursday Book Group

The Fourth Thursday Book Group will meet to discuss "A Woman of No Importance: The Untold Story of the American Spy Who Helped Win World War II," by Sonia Purnell. If you would like to join in, please email Ann Scott at eannscott56@gmail.com. **Thursday, Feb. 22, 12:30 pm, via Zoom**



Amazing Rebecca

On Jan. 16, Minister Emerita Rebecca Spencer was interviewed on "Amazing Woman Rhode Island," Deb Ruggeiro's podcast that highlights women who make a difference. Rebecca discussed her retirement after 35 years at Central, raising cows on her farm, spiritual awakening, and how to find common ground in turbulent times. There are many ways to listen. Go to <https://amazingwomenri.com> to see which option works for you.

Accolades

On New Year's Day 2024, The Boston Globe featured Central member **Amy Hebb** and her nonprofit **Second Serve Resale** in its "Ocean State Innovators" column.

A longtime thrift shopper, Amy had seen the boom of secondhand clothing stores and growth of online shops – and thought nonprofits deserved a cut. She founded Second Serve Resale in 2021 while still working as an attorney. Her goal was to lower the consumption of new clothing items while providing 85 percent of the proceeds to nonprofits. And here's the clincher: the purchaser chooses the nonprofit!

In just two years, Second Serve Resale has raised almost \$25,000 for such organizations as Meals on Wheels of Rhode Island, New England Science & Sailing, San Francisco-Marin Food Bank, Save the Bay, Sojourner House, The Tomorrow Fund, Union Station Homeless Services, and The Westerly College Club.

However, Amy hopes for even greater impact. "People clean out closets and then buy all new stuff. We want them to repopulate their closets with resale items. The donor and the buyer can and should be the same person. If we, as a society, can build that ecosystem, then we can start to move away from fast fashion and such as a disposable culture."

To shop, log onto www.secondserversale.org. **To donate**, contact Amy at amy@secondserversale.org. Currently, Second Serve Retail accepts designer and name-brand women's clothing, shoes, handbags, and other accessories. As Amy explained, "You win, the community wins, and of course, the environment wins."

Matthew Healey for The Boston Globe



In The Gallery

This month, The Gallery at Central features the works of ten artists from **Four Corners Gallery** in scenic Tiverton, R.I.

Established in 2022, Four Corners Gallery is artist-owned and -operated – and dedicated to exhibiting original, unique, professionally displayed artwork. The cooperative currently supports 15 local artists working in a wide range of media, including oil, acrylic, pastel, ceramics, photography, and collage. Exhibits change frequently, making Four Corners Gallery a year-round cultural destination.

Showing in The Gallery this month:

- **Dina Doyle**: Oil Painting
- **Barbara Edlund Healy**: Painting
- **Anne S. Holtermann**: Painting
- **Carolyn Lock**: Oil Painting
- **Karen Melanson**: Pastel Painting
- **Robin Nunes**: Oil Painting
- **Stephen Remick**: Oil Painting
- **Galen V. Snow**: Paper Montage
- **Caroline Unruh**: Ceramics
- **Nancy R.M. Whitin**: Painting

See more from Four Corners Gallery at www.fourcornersgalleryri.com – or visit at 3848 Main Avenue in Tiverton. **Come, meet the artists at the opening reception, Friday, Feb. 9, 5 to 7 pm, in the Gallery.**



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www.facebook.com/CentralChurchRI

Friday Film Fare



Mopping floors and cleaning bathrooms in a highly secret government installation, lonely, mute Elisa (Sally Hawkins) is trapped in a life of routine and isolation. When she and her co-worker (Octavia Spencer) encounter the subject of a classified experiment, Elisa is drawn to a creature as lonely, isolated, and indeed as mute as herself. And things quickly become ... complicated.

A dizzying amalgam of Cold War thriller, elaborate fairy tale, beauty-and-beast fable, and even 1950s swamp creature horror film, **The Shape of Water** is one unique cinema experience from master film magician Guillermo del Toro. To paraphrase Elton John: oh, but it's weird and it's wonderful!

Join host Jim Silverthorn on Friday, Feb. 16, at 7:30 pm, in the Fireplace Room. [123 minutes; color; rated R, 2017]

Summer Mission Trip

CCC Youth's 2024 summer mission trip is on – to a New England location still to be determined



– for **July 13 to 18**. We'll hold informational sessions this February via Zoom, as well as in-person. **Contact Larry Kellam** (email: larry_kellam@waters.com or text: 401-474-8584) for more information and to reserve your spot!

Help Amos House

Amos House operates Rhode Island's largest emergency family shelter at the former Charlesgate facility in Providence. Currently, 41 families are housed there, and within the next few weeks, that number will increase to 57 families. The social services organization is in desperate need of **Diapers** (sizes newborn, 1, and 2) and other supplies for babies and toddlers – whether new or gently used:

- **Pack and Plays**
- **High Chairs**
- **Walkers**

Please deliver gently used donations directly to Amos House. Or, if you collect a number of items, contact Jessica Salter, Chief Philanthropy and Communications Officer, jsalter@amoshouse.com, to schedule a pickup.

Or, you can order new items as well as diapers from **Amos House's Amazon Wish List** (www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/3IPXLPYGHZ4U7?ref_=wl_share), and the supplies will be delivered directly to them.

Lunch and Learn: Reading Ruth

In times past, families would gather together to hear the Bible read aloud. This was how most of the first followers of the Christian Way encountered the holy scriptures. And that is what we will do this coming March.

In the Book of Ruth, one of the shortest books in the Bible, a Moabite woman named Ruth marries into a Jewish family and becomes one of Jesus' ancestors: King David's great-grandmother. (Check it out in Matthew 1:5-6.)

Please join us for a soup and bread lunch as we listen to Ruth's story of disaster, perseverance, and loyalty in its entirety with a short discussion afterward. RSVP to Claudia. **Sunday, Mar. 10, 11:30 am to**



1 pm, in the Fireplace Room

Central Congregational Church

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