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### MODERATOR'S MESSAGE

Each time the Association Executive Committee meets with the pastor and lay leaders of a congregation, we hear something new and helpful. After the Deer Isle folks expressed a desire for more stories about what other congregations are doing, I took that message to the Conference PIC Committee – (these acronyms drive me nuts but I think that stands for Proclamation, Identity and Communication). One result is a new feature on the Maine Conference web page ([maineucc.org](http://maineucc.org)) – “What Works.” Congregations will be invited to share experiences on various topics through the year, the first being Ash Wednesday and Lenten practices. We hope to produce some feature stories about unusual, innovative or especially successful church programs that will also be posted on the web site with links from ACE (All Conference E-mail).

We most recently met with the folks at the downtown Ellsworth church. Although we usually ask pastors and lay leaders how the Association might better serve them, in this case we were asked how churches could better serve and support the Association. .

I would propose that both can be supported by congregations viewing delegate positions as more than attending a couple of meetings a year and producing an annual report. I'm suggesting that, for example, congregational delegates to the Association take primary responsibility for keeping their fellow parishioners informed of Association news. They might assemble an e-mail list of parishioners and forward to them each issue of *Keeping Connected* and take responsibility for photocopying issues for parishioners who lack computer access. They might periodically highlight, during announcement time at Sunday worship, a particular event – a concert, fair, supper – coming up at a sister Association church. And they might take responsibility for providing contributions from their church for each *Keeping Connected* issue. Mostly, we rely on clergy to do all this communication. But their plates already are full and this kind of effort by lay folks could make a real difference.

So I would challenge our Association delegates to become more active in keeping us all connected. I would welcome responses to this suggestion as well as suggestions for future issues. Just e-mail me at [dgoodman39@myfairpoint.net](mailto:dgoodman39@myfairpoint.net).

Wishing you all a blessed Lenten season,

Denise Goodman

## EDITOR'S NOTE

THANK YOU! THANK YOU! We've had the best response ever for this newsletter! How wonderful to keep so connected! A few quick notes: So far I have 24 pages of information. Denise Goodman and I try to include all necessary information but cannot always print your entire message. Also, when sending your articles, if you can include them in the text of the email it makes things much, much easier. I have an old computer that doesn't like to open attachments. Usually I can eventually convert it but it's a long process.

Be thinking about activities this summer, Spring is on it's way and before we know it, we'll start putting together the next newsletter, which should include summer events. We'll send out reminders before the next issue is due. Thanks again for your wonderful participation in this issue of "Keeping Connected."

Peace to all, Pat email: [jpbutter6@yahoo.com](mailto:jpbutter6@yahoo.com)

### SAVE THIS DATE

The Spring Association Meeting will be May 1 at the Hancock Church. Conference personnel will present a workshop on developing safe church policies. Encourage those in your congregation who may be engaged in this process or may be called on to develop such a policy to attend this gathering. We will also be choosing several nominees to represent us at the next two General Synods. (The Conference Nominating Committee will make the final decision, choosing one from among those we put forward that best matches the need for clergy/lay, gender and age requirements.)

### BAR HARBOR

Sunday School fifth graders are reading "The Case for Christ for Kids" that helps to bring Jesus to life – through cross examination! Written originally for adults by Lee Strobel, a former legal editor of the *Chicago Tribune* who goes from atheism to Christianity, the children's version addresses the miracles, ministry, and way of life of Jesus through kid-friendly terms, humor, and illustrations. They are sifting through and discussing the truths that history, science, psychiatry, literature, and religion reveal about Christ.

To beat the cabin fever blues, the Bar Harbor church hosts an annual Game Night Potluck each January with board games for all ages – kids and adults.

Bar Harbor youth continue to generously support Hirut Suloro, the young Ethiopian girl that our Sunday School sponsors through their weekly offering.

### BELFAST

The **Rev. Dr. Marvin Ellison** from Bangor Theological Seminary, was guest speaker January 10 at the First Church in Belfast as part of our efforts to prepare for our work on an Open and Affirming statement. We also were blessed that day with the music of "**Voices for Peace**", a group with members from around the mid-coast region. They were wonderful and we would highly recommend them to any of our churches in the Association.

We took in three new members January 24. At our Annual **Meeting** that day, we voted on and passed by a large margin, the **Welcoming Statement** prepared by our ONA Team, and decided to become an **Open and Affirming congregation** (see the Welcoming Statement below). Some of our youth collected donations and canned goods on February 7, for the **Souper Bowl of Caring Sunday** (\$82.35 and 20 items of food were

collected and donated to our Belfast Food Cupboard and the St. Francis Soup Kitchen). Our **Valentine's Dinner** on Saturday, Feb. 13, included delicious lasagna, salad, bread, beverage and sundae and musical entertainment featuring songs from the 1940's, 50's and 60's, of a romantic theme, sung by members and friends of First Church. The house was packed and we made \$800 (after expenses) at the door, which was divided between our own church ministries and **Habitat for Humanity of Waldo County**, plus additional donations for Habitat exceeding another \$100, giving Habitat a total donation of over \$500!

On the following weekend, Feb. 19-21, we hosted the **State Youth Council's Mid-Winter retreat!** Nearly 60 high school youth and adults were present (hopefully some from your churches!). We housed them, fed them and provided space for them as they enjoyed getting to know one another, participated in workshops, had service projects (some packed hygiene kits for Haiti while a group of strong boys helped Pastor Joel take down the Live Nativity manger scene that still stood in the front of the church), went to the YMCA, and then led the worship service on Sunday morning. A wonderful event, we were blessed by the presence of these young people from our conference and trust that by our participation with them, were a blessing for them and an acknowledgement of their importance to all of us within the conference. We hope you will encourage your own youth to become engaged in the conference middle school and high school programs available to them, especially the Middle School event planned for May 2, and the high school level **New England Regional Youth Event (RYE)** coming up in late June!

We continue to hold, in addition to our regular worship service on Sunday, a mid-week communion service at the parsonage on Wednesday evenings as well as a special Lenten study on every other Friday evening at the parsonage on the person of Jesus Christ, who he is for us in our day and time. We will be using the "Living the Questions" series for this. In addition, the Greater Bay Area Ministerium, of which our pastors are part, is offering a Lenten Luncheon Series held at the First Baptist Church in Belfast, with a theme of "Faith and Finances" with different clergy from the ministerium sharing on various topics each Wednesday at noon, throughout Lent. Other upcoming events include a public dinner on the Saturday before St. Patrick's Day (traditional Irish boiled dinner) and of course, the special services for Holy Week. Along with all of that, we are in the process of hiring new staff, both an Office Administrator and a new Custodian.

### **The First Church Welcoming Statement**

***We, the people of the First Church in Belfast, United Church of Christ, declare ourselves to be a gathered body of Christians, ever open to the voice of the Still Speaking God. In the spirit of those who worshipped here before us for over 200 years, we strive to witness God's love and Jesus' example in the wider community. To that end, we engage and support all people, whoever they may be and wherever they are on their spiritual journey, in worship, fellowship and service.***

***We intentionally and joyfully welcome people of every race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, marital status, physical and mental ability, socio-economic situation and faith background into the full life, ministry, sacraments and leadership of this church. We celebrate and support family in all its diverse forms and recognize and bless all loving and committed relationships. Together, we will strive, in the words of the prophet Micah, "to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God."***

## **BLUE HILL**

### **PILGRIM LODGE LOCAL CHURCH JUMPER TRAINING BY TELECONFERENCE**

(Moderator's Note: Here is an example of how new teleconferencing technology is pioneering new ways to keep far-flung Conference congregations connected.)

First Congregational Church of Blue Hill took a step into the world of virtual conferencing when we participated in a Pilgrim Lodge teleconference Saturday Feb. 20<sup>th</sup>. Pilgrim Lodge Jumper Training was broadcast from Saco to five churches around the state, in Presque Isle, Machias, Fryeburg, Waterville and Blue Hill. This training is designed to prepare a representative from each church to publicize Pilgrim Lodge this spring. Very early on a sunny Saturday, a computer-savvy church member and I came to the church and tinkered with our computers, trying to get them to boot up with some new programs.

About 9 am visitors from Bar Harbor Congregational Church arrived, pulled up office chairs, and after a little small talk, peered into our screen expectantly. We had done two previous trial runs of the teleconference, but today the sound was at first intermittent and the computers were sluggish. We had fingers crossed that the internet connection would hold. It did: at 9:30 am the screen lit up with a "Pilgrim Lodge Jumper Training Session" from Maine Outdoor Ministries director Bryan Breault, broadcast in living color from Saco. We saw and heard the talk, watched a power point presentation and were able to type in questions. This proved to be an effective and fun way to learn the information without having to drive to a central location (despite a few technical problems we have to straighten out before our next teleconference). We got great ideas on spreading the word about Pilgrim Lodge, discussed them with the folks from Bar Harbor Congregational, and we learned valuable lessons in technology as well. (For those who missed the televised training, Jumper Training will be held again March 6, 9:30 to noon, at All Souls Congregational Church in Bangor.)

### **Simmering Pot – Free Supper Every Monday at First Congregational Church Blue**

The Simmering Pot serves home-made meals of soup and bread at the Blue Hill Congregational Church every Monday from 2:30 to 6:00 p.m. This is a project of the Tree of Life Food Pantry. The Congregational Church is pleased to be able to provide space for this community event. Meals are made from scratch, and the bread is baked on the premises. Many ingredients are donated by local farmers. There is no charge, a donation basket is available. The Simmering Pot is a great place to meet friends, socialize and enjoy a delicious nutritious meal. You can also pick up a meal to take home or take to a friend. For more information contact the First Congregational Church of Blue Hill, 374-2891.

## **MONROE**

### **Monroe Community Church, UCC**

**April 10, 2010** - Saturday is our Greek Cuisine Supper - 5:30 - 7 pm - These suppers are not the typical church suppers of the past. The area is decorated to give it a taste of Greece in Monroe ME

**May 8, 2010** - Yard Sale at the Varney Building 8 am - 2 pm

**May 22, 2010** - Saturday is our Asian Cuisine Supper 5:30 - 7 pm

**May 31, 2010** - Monday - Memorial Day. Pancake breakfast at the church from 7 am - 9 am and also that day we hold a pie sale at the Gesner Park in conjunction with the Monroe Lions Club celebration.

**June 4, 2010** - Friday "The Hyssongs" (Musical group) will be back at our church at 7 pm for a concert.

For Supper reservations or more information, people can call Bernys #525-4431

## BUCKSPORT

### Elm Street Congregational Church, Bucksport

**Building Restoration:** The initial repairs have been completed to the outside of the church building. The Church now has insulation that was put into the outside walls, vinyl siding placed on the outside of the building, and a roof with an ice and water shield and new flashing along with new heavy weight shingles. The window sills had white aluminum put on them and the two roof ledges on the back of the church received white aluminum covers. The pillars and brick pathway in the front of the church will be repaired in the spring.

**Building Addition:** A new addition near the church offices has been completed. It gives our church some much needed storage space along with a sitting area with great light for small meetings and leisure moments.

**Stove:** Our church has been able to lower the electric bill after installing a new kitchen stove.

**Furnace:** A new furnace was installed in the sanctuary section of our church. This will help with keeping the heating costs lower and also to maintain a good supply of heat for church services and other events.

**Hat and Mitten Drive:** A hat and mitten drive proved to be very successful during the month of December. Over 20 pairs of hats and mittens were collected and donated to the Bucksport Community Concerns Food Pantry for distribution to families.

**Picture Directory:** In coordination with the Olan Mills company our church has completed our new church picture directory. It has given our church members updated information of others who come to church along with pictures of activities that our church members have done.

**Church Website:** A wonderful volunteer has given our website a much needed face-lift. New activities and other items are added frequently. Please check out the website at [www.elmstreetcc.org](http://www.elmstreetcc.org).

## MAINE CONFERENCE COORDINATING COUNCIL

One of the discussions at our last meeting and also will be on the agenda in March is educating churches of the importance of upping their giving to OCWM - OUR CHURCHES WIDER MISSION – Please, churches, if you can just increase what you have given in the past by a small amount .....

## ELLSWORTH

### 56th Annual Men's Communion Breakfast

The First Congregational Church of Ellsworth, United Church of Christ, invites men of all ages to the 56th Annual Men's Communion Service and Breakfast on Sunday, March 21st at 7:00 AM. The Rev. Gary DeLong, Executive Director of the Maine Seacoast Missionary Society will be our guest preacher. After worship in the sanctuary, we will go downstairs for fellowship and a full breakfast. We suggest a \$5.00 donation to help cover costs. We finish the meal around 8:30- 8:45 am.

**CROP WALK, May 2nd** - We welcome you to walk with for the Annual CROP WALK on Sunday, May 2, at 1:30 pm, here at First Congregational Church, UCC, in Ellsworth. The total amount raised by walkers supports hunger relief efforts in the community and around the globe. 25% will go to the Emmaus Center and the Loaves and Fishes Food Pantry, both in Ellsworth. As you know, Church World Service responded quickly and generously to local ecumenical relief agencies in Haiti and in Chile. They will continue to do so. There will be an organizational meeting here with Amy Porter of CWS on Sunday, March 21, at 2:00 pm. If your church is participating, please send a representative to this meeting to learn details and pick up walking papers and promotional materials. Feel free to contact me at 667-8321 for more information.

## **CALLING ALL YOUTH**

Susie Craig, our Associate Conference Minister, wants to encourage your youth to join 30 other Maine teens already signed up for the New England Regional Youth Event June 24-27 on the Boston University campus. Some 300 youth region-wide are expected to attend and focus on "Inside-out, Outside-in: Finding Our Way in God's World." Some scholarship help is available. Mainers will gather in Saco the night before and travel by bus to Boston the next day. Contact Susie at the Conference Office if you have questions and you can also Google "New England Youth Event" on the Internet.