

## **From the Pastor**

Welcome to Summer! We just celebrated Pentecost, a day that we lift up God's pouring out of God's spirit on all people: male and female, young and old, Republican and Democrat, gay and straight, rich and poor, black, brown, yellow and white, and, well, you get the idea. In the spirit of the season (that continues as "ordinary time" until Advent), we celebrate God's Spirit that gathers diverse people together and celebrates the gifts that each person offers. How wonderful is that? Unfortunately, in the past few weeks, Christianity in the United States has seen continued restrictions on Roman Catholic nuns and at least two cases of fundamentalist Protestant preachers calling for detention camps or execution of LGBT people. From clamping down on those who serve those on the outcast, to preaching a gospel of hate, the public perception that Christians are projecting are ones that are more and more restricting and repellant to the culture that we live and breathe in. A culture that offers many gifts but could also use a bit of transformation (e.g. ongoing wars, an astonishing gap between the wealthiest 400 Americans and everybody else, high poverty rates and people who are hungry, etc.)

I give thanks for the ongoing witness of Congregational Church. As do many congregations within the United Church of Christ, Congregational takes seriously Christ's call to offer radical hospitality to all people. In a day when many outside the church seem more filled with love and grace than those who speak for the church, this witness of welcome is transformational and inspiring.

It takes a lot of practice to welcome people wherever they are on life's journey without trying too hard or putting on any appearance of strings or pressure. But I think Congregational really has internalized this call. We are all still working on our issues and will always be learning how to be the beloved community. I am proud of this band of followers!

Another aspect of recognizing the Spirit's work among us involves creating and sustaining community. I have heard that Mother Theresa once noted that the leading disease in America is loneliness. Given the fact that many of us live away from extended families and given the intense political polarization, more and more of us ache for community. Churches seem a natural antidote for that loneliness. We can bring our selves to a gathering of other people, each of us broken but striving, and give and receive nurture and encouragement. Given the hatefulness that the public face of Christianity often projects, we will likely have to earn credibility. How do we go about making our welcome known? How do we earn that credibility?

As we all walk the talk, the Spirit will enable the witness.

In God's peace,  
Pastor Lynn