

Ministry Update Report May 2025

A. Upcoming Activities and Dates

May 17	9a-4p	SNEUCC training at FCCW
May 21	7p – 8p	Windham Association Annual Meeting
May 22	1:30p	Senior Social WCoA and Game Day
May 26	10a	Hill Cemetery Memorial Day Blessing
May 26	11:30a	Memorial Day Parade and Ceremony
June 7	9:30a – 1pm	SNEUCC Annual Meeting
June 8	9:30 a	Church Outing

B. Ministry Update

1. Faith Formation

Weekly Prayer Meetings

The prayer meetings continue at 6pm on Wednesday. With the end of food and fun, this might be an opportunity to encourage deeper reflection, contemplative practice, and explorations of Nonviolent resistance.

Houses of Hope

The Houses of Hope Program Team have created a Gratitude "workbook" that we should receive in the next few days. The program lead, Phil, says that they are still editing a few last things, but wanted to go ahead and get them sent to us anyway.

We are one of three churches that are entering Phase III, Gratitude. The other two churches are Fredonia Presbyterian and First Presbyterian in Palacios.

The Houses of Hope Program Team are organizing a call (sometime between May 19 and May 27) with the pastors and other representatives from each congregation to discuss launching the Gratitude curriculum. We will explore ways the gratitude curriculum can be introduced in our respective congregations, even though each congregation may implement it differently.

In addition, I have asked our Houses of Hope team to identify dates and times when we might meet between May 27 and June 15. We will

- explore Phase III,
- think about ways to keep the lessons, exercises and experiences from Phases 1 and 2 fresh among us , and
- how to introduce Phase I and II activities and experiences to congregants, e.g., contemplative spirituality small group? Co-facilitating a group experience to lead congregants through the Houses of Hope Phase I and II activities?

Other Faith Formation Activities

The summer season seems to have begun earlier this year than in other years. The Tuesday conversations concluded the end of March, Saturday Bible Study April 19.

Although there is interest in pursuing more conversation, e.g. a book of the Bible a month, the Exploring the Bible Series in the Fall, etc. plans have not been established yet.

Youth and Families Gathering

I have invited families to coordinate calendars to hold a BBQ at my home this summer, in June or July.

2. Faith In Action

Quiet Corner Interfaith Community Organizing Study Group

Monthly conversations of the Windham County Interfaith Action Alliance Sponsoring Group (a working title) continue. The next conversation is May 22 at 2nd Coventry at 4pm.

in Willimantic. In addition, I am meeting with the Rabbi and Lead organizer on Thursday May 15 to discuss the next steps.

Rise up and Sign display.

Overall, the Easter Sunday placement of signs, songs and prayers seemed to be well received by congregants. A couple of congregants shared with me that they were proud of our congregation for placing our values and beliefs at the core and visibly distinguishing our congregation from the rhetoric of Christian Nationalism.

The only negative comment I heard was from one couple who, though they agree that the rhetoric and exceptionalism expressed by Christian Nationalism is not representative of our faith; they believe that the congregation should not do anything that may draw attention or be remotely seen as political. Although I understand their fears and appreciate their concerns, there are times when fulfilling Jesus' commandment to love one another and feed his sheep and "do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God" requires us to stand up and speak out.

I acknowledge that this is difficult and challenging to balance. And I know that this is uncomfortable. I pray that emphasizing the spiritual legacy as New England Congregationalists, our core values and beliefs will continue to guide us in powerful, prophetic, and peaceful ways.

On the other hand, I have heard from five different people from the community who either receive our newsletter, were forwarded our newsletter, or watched our worship online. Collectively they affirmed that they felt that the messages struck the right balance, appreciated the grounding in our values and polity of New England Congregationalism, and was focused on pushing back against Christian Nationalism. One shared, "I love what your church is doing." And another, that they "shared your email explaining the signs and rise up far and wide as the example of what we need to be doing, and how it should be done."

Lastly, Jesus is political, not partisan, but political. And that may feel shocking and uncomfortable. "Politics" is about power. And Jesus was political because he was concerned with standing for and speaking of the right use of power, as well as standing up to and speaking out against the misuse of power and abusive, compromised forms of "love."

May 26 Memorial Day

I will preside at the annual blessing of veterans at the Hill Cemetery and provide the invocation and benediction at the Town's Memorial Day ceremony.

3. Care Ministry and the Deacons

The Deacons met with the East Woodstock Deacons on May 5 to coordinate summer worship.

We agreed that worship will be at 9am throughout the July and August, and we will hold to the historic pattern with one exception. Based on my recommendation, we will alter which church produces the worship bulletins. This year the church responsible for providing the speaker will produce the bulletins, i.e., East in July and First in August. I believe that this will resolve a longstanding gap in the process, which created challenges every summer.

4. Worship

Lenten Season

To date I have received the following comments from congregants regarding the Lenten series and Contemplative Spirituality activities:

- One found the way that we did prayers during lent to be refreshing and the silence a blessing.
- Three people shared how meaningful the Maundy Thursday service was, including the nailing of the cards to the cross and hearing tapping while we sang the closing song and when everything else went dark.
- One person commented on the beauty of the sung responses.

Although I asked for congregants to share their experiences with the contemplative practices, to date I have not received any feedback.

May and June Series: Courageous Hope.

The current worship series is “Courageous Hope: Dream Boldly, Live Bravely, Love Deeply.” It is intentionally designed to guide participants from personal transformation and inner peace to collective action and community renewal.

Each week interweaves scriptural insights with the nonviolent frameworks of Jesus’ third way, MLK’s six principles, and Gandhi’s eight principles, ensuring that participants journey from personal healing to a collective transformation deeply rooted in radical love and justice. MLK’s nonviolence stresses the power of agape love, courageous truth-telling, and the creation of a “beloved community,” while Gandhi’s approach (satyagraha) centers on ahimsa (non-harm), self-sacrifice, and spiritual discipline. Both viewed nonviolence as a transformative process that begins internally and ripples outward to change society.

June 8 Worship

June 8 will be our annual church outing and worship. Debby Kirk has offered to help organize and coordinate the potluck and other logistics.

July and August Summer Worship

July and August worship will be at 9am. July will be at First Congregational with East providing the preacher and the bulletins; and August at East with us providing the speaker and the bulletins. August 31 is the Sunday of Labor Day weekend. This will be at East Woodstock. I am working with Pastor Gary to determine if he or I will preach.

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The August theme is “Prophetic Imagination: Envisioning a Community of Justice and Hope.” I am working with Nancy from East Woodstock to plant the music and finalize the liturgy.

September - Grateful Hearts, Generous Hands: Forgiveness as a Gift

This four-week series invites us to journey from experiencing God’s transformative forgiveness to extending that grace within our community. We will explore how a grateful heart naturally leads to forgiving others, how forgiveness liberates us, and how practicing trust and practical reconciliation (including the Five Languages of Apology) renews and deepens our relationships. Ultimately, this journey not only heals wounds but also rebuilds a foundation of trust that carries our community forward.

October – November: Dreaming God’s Dream: No gift too small, not dream too big

We have ordered and received the UCC’s 2025-26 Stewardship Campaign resources. The theme this year is “Dreaming God’s Dream: No gift too small, not dream too big.” This seems to fit well with what we have been exploring as a congregation.

The series will begin October 5, World Communion Sunday, and end on November 23.