

# THE TOWER

FEBRUARY 2013

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## A NOTE FROM THE MINISTER

“Mindfully ‘Giving Up Something’ for Lent”



Lent comes early this year as Easter falls on March 31. Thus Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the Lenten season, falls on February 13. We Protestants still are not sure what to do about traditional Christian holy days like Ash Wednesday and liturgical seasons on the church calendar like Lent. Those who have joined our Congregational churches from Roman Catholic backgrounds were brought up in church to “give up something” for Lent. By itself, that’s not such a bad thing. But if the Lenten season is going to have a meaningful impact on one’s spiritual life, we must “give up something” with a clear purpose in mind.

The tradition of Lent was already in place in Rome by the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century as a way of identifying with Jesus when he fasted for 40 days and nights in the wilderness tempted by the devil. But Jesus did not give up food for that time just for the sake of “giving up something.” He purposely spent that time to prepare himself spiritually for the beginning of his ministry. Though he was tempted to turn stones into bread, make himself invulnerable, and gain power over people, he rejected all of those things. Later in life, Jesus would perform incredible miracles, but only for others, never for himself. His triumph over the temptations of the devil mightily displayed that he was ready to fulfill the work to which he was called: preaching, teaching, healing, and gathering around him a community of faithful followers.

If we “give up something” for Lent, let’s do it mindfully. Let’s notice that our life isn’t much more miserable just because we’re not eating chocolate for 40 days. Let’s observe that our world isn’t falling apart because we haven’t used any swear words. Let’s recognize that our body isn’t being thrown into a convulsion because we’re not lighting up a cigarette every half-hour. As we improve ourselves, the world improves as well. We should never ask, “What difference can I, one person, make in changing the world?” The only way that the world can change is one person at a time. Even one who gives “a cup of cold water” will receive a reward, according to Jesus (Matthew 10:42). That tiny, insignificant act serves to change the world, making it a better place.

The truly important thing about “giving up something” for Lent is to choose to do something that takes you out of your comfort zone. In other words, making a real sacrifice. It doesn’t matter what it is. If it forces you to change something about your habitual lifestyle, then it can be an opportunity for spiritual growth. Every time that you’re tempted to grab that candy bar or pick up that cigarette, be aware of Christ and the reasons that you’re refusing to engage in that practice. You might be pleasantly surprised to discover new insights about yourself, and perhaps even about God and the world.

By the way, if you choose to fast periodically during Lent, you should be glad to know that there’s some scientific evidence that fasting actually helps the brain, protecting against Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s, and other neurological diseases. Maybe Jesus was onto a good thing.

Blessings in Christ,

Pastor Gary

\* \* \* \* \*



Jennifer Nodelman February 7  
Hazel Lobo February 23

\* \* \* \* \*

**NEW TELEPHONE NUMBER:**

Shirley Elbe now has a new unlisted phone number. If you would like to have it, you must speak to her.



Our Youth Group continues their weekly meetings with vitality and service. Attendance is good and ideas from the youth are plentiful. The youth are particularly sensitive to the concerns of our church shut-ins and are focusing their youthful efforts toward this sector of our Park Congregational Church family. The Church family's needs are their needs. They are here to serve in any way they can.

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## SAVE THE DATE! SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 9<sup>th</sup>

The Sunday School is hosting their annual VALENTINE'S DAY SPAGHETTI SUPPER on Saturday, February 9, 2013, in Gordon Hall at 6:00pm. Tickets are available in the church office, from any Sunday School teacher, or by calling the church office at 508-752-2468. Yummy Food and Basket Raffle! Adults \$8.50 - Children ages 5-12 \$5.00 - Under 5 years old eat for free! AS ALWAYS, a wonderful meal, dessert, and Basket Raffle will make for a delightful evening! ALL ARE WELCOME!

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**THANK YOU DEAR FRIENDS OF  
PARK CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH**

. . . for your prayers on the occasion of my Dad's [Dr. Lee F. Bartlett, Jr.] illness and for your support and prayers on his death. Pastor Gary and Linda represented the Parish, along with other parishioners at the gatherings. May God bless you.

The Bartletts

**DON'T MISS DR. PETER MAKARI'S LECTURE,  
"CHRISTIAN PRESENCE IN ISRAEL/PALESTINE: HOPES AND CHALLENGES IN WITNESS"  
ON SUNDAY AFTERNOON, FEBRUARY 10, AT 3:00PM AT  
UNITED CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, 6 INSTITUTE ROAD, WORCESTER**

Dr. Makari will speak about 50 minutes using a PowerPoint presentation showing the United Church of Christ's historic and current relationships in the Middle East, our mission partners, and the context in which they work. He will also make some remarks about the document, "Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth," written by our Palestinian Christian brothers and sisters who are crying out for justice. They wrote this document in 2009 to tell the world about what is happening in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem. The Palestinian Christian authors of this document have declared "a moment of truth" when "a word of faith and hope" must be spoken "from the heart of Palestinian suffering" and heard by the worldwide Church. Dr. Makari will conclude with some comments about the October 5, 2012, letter from 15 religious leaders representing major faith groups, including the UCC, to the US Congress on US military aid to Israel. There will be a Question and Answer time as well.

Dr. Makari, Ph.D., has served in the capacity of Executive for the Middle East and Europe with the Common Global Ministries Board of the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) since July 1, 2000. He also serves ecumenically as the Co-Chair of the National Council of Churches Interfaith Relations Commission. An Egyptian-American, Peter has lived in the Middle East, where he worked with the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS) in Cairo (1991-1994), and then with the Middle East Council of Churches, based in Limassol, Cyprus (1997-2000). He earned an M.A. in Middle East Studies from the American University in Cairo (1993) and a Ph.D. in Politics and Middle East Studies from New York University (2003). He is the author of *Conflict and Cooperation: Christian-Muslim Relations in Contemporary Egypt*, Syracuse University Press, 2007. He, his wife, and two daughters are members of Olmsted Community Church (UCC) in Olmsted Falls, Ohio. Please come and hear one of the most significant voices on the situation in the Middle East.

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**ALWAYS KEEP THE FOLLOWING WINTER EMERGENCY ITEMS AVAILABLE:**

- |  |                                  |
|--|----------------------------------|
| flashlight and extra batteries                               | non-perishable food              |
| portable radio or NOAA Weather Radio<br>with extra batteries | extra blankets and sleeping bags |
| first-aid kit  | bottled water                    |
|  | non-electric can opener          |



ASH WEDNESDAY

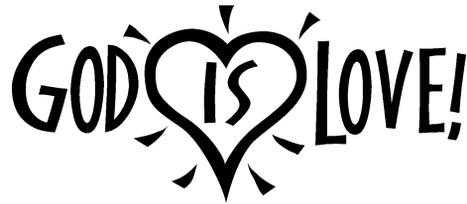
**AN ASH WEDNESDAY SERVICE WILL BE HELD IN DAVIS CHAPEL  
ON FEBRUARY 13 AT 7:00PM**

In our society we tend not to think about death, especially our own death. We don't even like to use the word *death*. Physicians say that the patient has "expired." Funeral directors say that the loved one has "passed." Even clergy can be found to say that the parishioner "has gone to meet her maker." Very few in our society feel comfortable saying that the person has died. That's too bad. Without intending to be morbid, we should be thinking about our own mortality and the nature of human existence.

Even when asked how we would like to die, we say "painlessly" or "in my sleep." That is, in a way that is not part of life. This is a curiously modern phenomenon. Former societies did not shy away from speaking about death and dying. Death asks the question of all of us--including those who reject religion--about the purpose of life. We have today lost the urgency to talk about death in public, but the anxiety about death is still there. We just keep it to ourselves now. That is also too bad. Because when death is not part of our vocabulary anymore, we slowly lose the language needed to comfort others who are grieving over the death of loved ones. Using the excuse that they are respecting the person's privacy, many refuse to visit nursing homes and hospitals because those places remind them of death. Believe me, nursing home residents are begging to have their "privacy" interrupted!

We must realize that we cannot resolve the meaning of life without asking the question of death.

Ash Wednesday is the one day of the year that gives us the opportunity to reflect on death. During the Ash Wednesday Service, we are marked with ashes on our forehead (or the back of our hand) in the shape of a cross. We recite, "I [first name] am dust, and to dust I shall return." A brief message is delivered. Holy Communion is served. All of you should attend, even children, so that you may start your Lenten pilgrimage in the right way.



THE CHILDREN'S TOWER

February 2013

Dear Children,

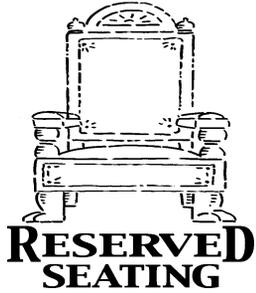
Okay. I can hear you already. "Here goes Miss Linda. We know what she will be talking about this month. The famous "L" word. What *else* but? It's February and we all know what is big time in February. Time to get ready NOW. Prepare! We know how Miss Linda thinks. No big secret here." Well, you are right. It *is* all about the "L" word. The four-letter "L" word that should be on all our minds as we enter the month of February. Yes, you even know the exact day in the middle of the month when the "L" word is on all our lips. So . . . let's really get down to the true meaning of that "L" word.

How about *devotion*? How about *sacrifice*? How about *giving*? How about spending more time thinking about that *special person* more than ever? How about going out of our way to fill our hearts with thoughts of the "L" word?

Yes, if each and every one of us really and truly experiences the meaning of the "L" word, and allow that meaning to fill our hearts to the brim, we cannot help but see our lives change for the better, not just during this month of February, but forever!! Oh, how wonderful that would be! YES! The power of the "L" word! The power of . . . okay, you know it . . . say it . . . those four letters that you are so sure you know (*or think you know*) Miss Linda is writing about. And together we say . . . LENT! February 13<sup>th</sup>! The beginning of the six-week season of Lent! A time of *devotion . . . sacrifice . . . giving . . . life changing!*

No fooling you. You knew it along. How wonderful! The power of that "L" word . . . LENT. The power of the greatest LOVE the world has ever known. Yep, you knew the word all along . . . right?

LOVE . . . *your friend, Linda*



**PLAN NOW** to reserve your seating for our LENTEN SERIES & LUNCHEONS, which will begin on Sunday, February 17, in the Lee Room following the worship service. Episodes from 7<sup>th</sup> Heaven will be shown. This popular weekly television series, which ran for 11 seasons (1996-2007), follows the Camden family as the minister father and stay-at-home mother of five children (expanded to seven) tackle real-life issues. Following each episode we will discuss the spiritual/moral issues raised. If you intend to come, please sign your name on the bulletin board sheet outside Davis Chapel or call the church office at 508-752-2468. Even if you intend not to be present for all the episodes, you should still register. *AGAIN*, by popular demand, Miss Emily (Smith) will prepare and serve her wonderful meals for us for a nominal fee! Yummy!! Sunday School children will eat for free!!!

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