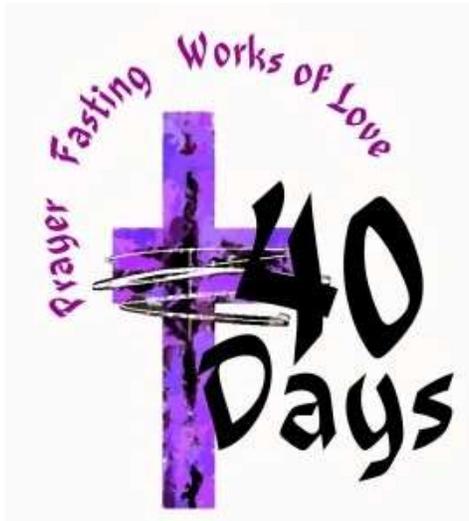


*The First Congregational Church of West Brookfield*

*United Church of Christ*



**February 22, 2026; 10 a.m.**

**REFLECT**

***“Life has its periods of darkness as well as its times of light, therefore Lent follows Epiphany. The experience of our Savior Jesus, like our own experience of life, leads us to the inevitable coming of temptation, suffering, and death. As we go through the valley of the shadow that begins with Ash Wednesday, so we learn to go gracefully. We learn to walk with Jesus in the dark as well as in the light. We learn that God is the God of human frailty as well as human strength, that God is the God of our desperation as well as our inspiration.”*** --

Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly—

**FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT  
ORDER OF WORSHIP**

*Words in **bold** are to be spoken in unison.*

 *Please stand as you are able.*

**Congregational Announcements**

**Pastoral Greeting**

**Prelude and Candle Lighting**

Stephen Page

**A Call to Return to God with All Our Hearts**

Linda Daskowski

Leader: Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the people.

**All: Let us gather and sanctify all of this congregation—young and old, male and female, joyful and sorrow-filled.**

Leader: This is a day of true repentance, a time to return to God with all our hearts.

**All: We return to God in true repentance for all those things which we have done that we should not have done and those things we have left undone which we should have done. We rend our hearts and not our garments.**

Leader: We seek God's amazing forgiveness.

**All: We affirm that God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.**

 **Hymn**

"Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness"

**#93**

**A Reading from Our Hebrew Scriptures**

Joel 2:12-19

**A Prayer of Request for the Start of Lent**

Pastor: God of Eternal Love,

**All: We have made our commitment to You,  
and have started a new journey into purposeful growth.  
But, we know that if we are to remain faithful  
we need Your help and Your strength.**

Pastor: So, we ask...

**All: Teach us to pray with faith and read Your Word with understanding. Teach us to worship with passion and gather together with love.**

**Teach us to give generously, serve compassionately  
and use our time mindfully, so that we may reflect Your goodness, and that others may  
discover Your grace through us.**

**In Jesus's name we pray. Amen.**

**A Reading from the Gospel**

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Reader: May God bless our hearing and understanding of this reading from our sacred texts.

**All: Word of God, Word of Life, Thanks be to God**

**Prayer Hymn (please remain seated)**

"There Is a Balm in Gilead"

**#631**

**Prayers of the People** Sharing Concerns, Joys ~ Pastoral Prayer

~ Lord's Prayer~

***Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.***

***And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.***

**Call to Offering and Offertory Music**

*(Offering plates are in the front and rear of the sanctuary for your gifts; you may place them in the plates during the music)*

**✠ A Doxology**

**Tune: # 34 (Old 100th)**

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise Christ, all creatures here below;  
Praise Holy Spirit evermore;  
One God, triune, whom we adore. Amen.**

**Youth Message**

**Special Music**

Stephen Page

**Sermon**

“Living for the Hell of It”

Rev. Doug Williamson

**✠ Hymn**

“Healer of Our Every Ill”

**#630**

**✠ Benediction (after which, please be seated for the postlude)**

Postlude

## **A SERVICE OF ASHES**

**A Centering Prayer for Lent**

Pastor: Let us pray together, preparing for the journey to the cross that lies ahead.

**All: We have chosen to fast: Not with ashes but with actions;  
Not with sackcloth but in sharing; Not in thoughts but in deeds.  
We will give up our abundance--to share our food with the hungry.  
We will give up our comfort--to provide homes for the destitute  
We will give up our fashions--to see the naked clothed  
We will share where others hoard; We will free where others  
oppress; We will heal where others harm.  
Then God’s light will break out on us; God’s healing will quickly  
appear; God will guide us always; God’s righteousness will go  
before us; We will find our joy in walking in the ways of Jesus.  
We will be like a well-watered garden; We will be called repairers of  
broken walls; Together we will feast at God’s banquet table. Amen.**

**The Ashes of Forgiveness**

Pastor: Ashes are a symbol of purification. As a fire burns, it can separate what is valuable from what is valueless, just as an assayer’s fire can separate a base metal from one that is precious. In this same way, these ashes are pure. They are a symbol of the new space that is now present within us for a new life. Let us claim the new life Jesus offers us by praying to our God:

**All: God of love and mercy, we come to you in prayer, seeking to change our hearts and minds. We confess the baggage of idols, bitterness, and self-concern that we so often drag along with us,**

struggling under its weight all the while as we attempt to follow Christ. Cleanse us from our attachment to these old things. Burn away their power in us and purify our hearts. In place of old ways fill us with the new fire of your Holy Spirit. Open up new opportunities for us to follow Jesus in loving you and our neighbors. In Jesus' name we ask these things. Amen.

Pastor: Friends, receive the good news of our faith, for in the name of Jesus, I announce our sins are forgiven. The old has died. Behold, the new has come!

*Those who wish, now come forward and receive the mark of these ashes as a sign of your forgiveness and new life. A benediction will follow.*



**Our Mission and Vision Statement:**

*We are a church where all are welcome to worship together, to share in fellowship and to grow spiritually in our journey with Christ. We value justice, diversity, and freedom of expression. We strive to serve our community and all God's creation and to spread the love of God to all people.*

**Welcome members, friends, and visitors to our service this morning!** If you are a guest with us, we invite you to sign our guest register and/or fill out a visitor card. Activity bags are available in the back of the sanctuary for children who are with us in worship.

**Prayer Requests**

Would you like to ask for prayers for someone? You may write your request in the red prayer book on the table located in the back of the sanctuary. A deacon will share them with the pastor. Please see a deacon with any questions.

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