



BELL TOWER

A Westhampton Church and Community Newsletter
published by Westhampton Congregational United Church of Christ,
an Open and Affirming Church
MARCH 2025 Vol. 54 No. 3

From your Worship and Spirituality Committee

March 5 is Ash Wednesday, which marks the beginning of the 40 days of the Lenten season. And it has been a very cold, dark, and snowy time lately. But the amount of daylight is increasing every day. And at Sunrise on April 20th we will have our annual Easter Sunrise Service, followed by our traditional 10am worship service in the sanctuary. We are still in our pastoral search, but I feel us getting closer. In the meantime, we are fortunate that the Reverend Chris Mereschuk has agreed to lead us through this time and will celebrate Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, and Easter Sunday with us. Come join us, won't you? ~ *Kevin O'Keefe, WaS*

Update from the Transition Team (and Search Committee)

Breaking news...our church profile has been posted! The Transition Team's work is done, and we've handed off the process to our Search Committee for the next stage of the journey. Those serving on the Search Committee are Kevin O'Keefe - chair, Lynn Cooper, Sarah Madden, Sue Tracy Small and myself Ruth Tracy. We've already met, and started to review applicants. Things are really moving and grooving now! I'd like to thank everyone for their continued patience and respect for this process. I will be continuing on as the Secretary of the Search Committee, and will endeavor to keep everyone updated as we get even closer to having a pastor. ~ *Ruth Tracy*

Fasting and Feasting

During Lent, consider this practical — and biblical — advice from Arthur Lichtenberger, a former presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church:

- Fast from criticism, and feast on praise.
- Fast from self-pity, and feast on joy.
- Fast from ill-temper, and feast on peace.
- Fast from resentment, and feast on contentment.
- Fast from jealousy, and feast on love.
- Fast from pride, and feast on humility.
- Fast from selfishness, and feast on service.
- Fast from fear, and feast on faith.

Lenten Signals

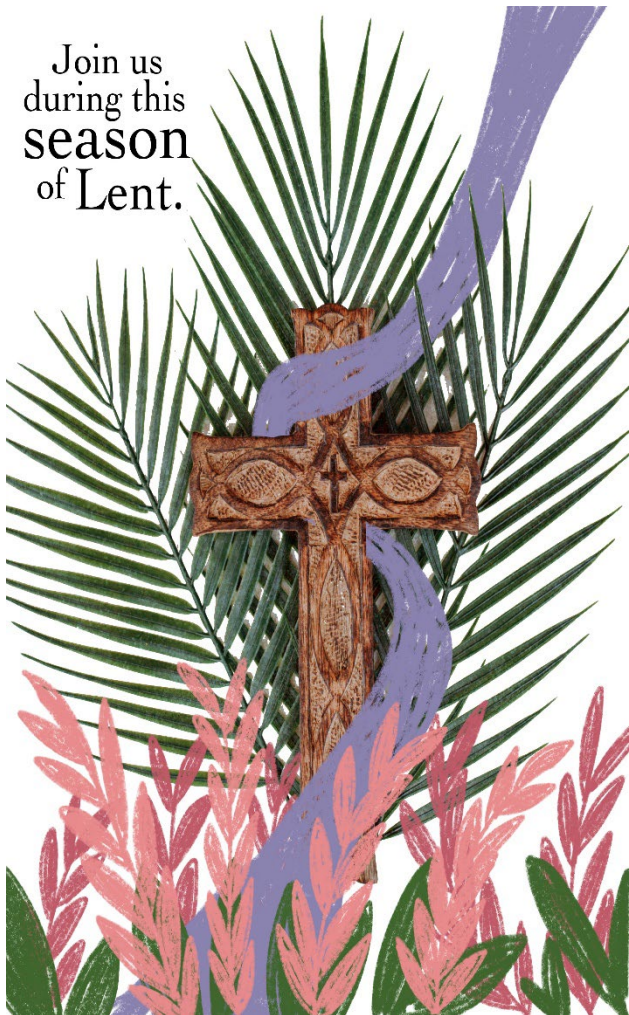
Why should we observe Lent? This 40-day season of repentance and reflection that begins on Ash Wednesday has three important purposes. Lent helps us STOP, LOOK and LISTEN.

- We observe Lent because it tells us to STOP and rest awhile — and to stop sinning.
- Lent tells us to LOOK inward for an honest self-examination, to LOOK upward to see the cross of Jesus with healing and love, and to LOOK forward to the hope of the Resurrection.
- And we observe Lent because it tells us to LISTEN — LISTEN to the voice of God, LISTEN to the words of Christ, and LISTEN to the movement of the Holy Spirit.

STOP, LOOK and LISTEN! These commands, that are so crucial for travel safety, are also important for our journey through Lent.



Join us
during this
season
of Lent.



Regular Church Meetings

Sun.	10:00am	Morning Worship in person and online: Zoom: 321 069 9076 – pw 248423
Mon.	7:00pm	WaS (1 st)
	7:00pm	Property (3 rd)
	7:00pm	Council (4 th)
Wed.	5-6pm	Food Pantry
	7:00pm	WOW (3 rd)
Thurs.	7:00pm	Choir
Fri.	11am-12pm	Food Pantry
	7:00pm	AA
Sat.	9-10am	Food Pantry

Women's Fellowship Director

March Pat Miller

Greeters

March ↑ Sue Tracy Small and Richie Small
↓ Pat Miller

Coffee Hour

March 2 - Jill Flanders
March 9 - Shirley Raymond
March 16 - Erika Subocz
March 23 - Jean Webster
March 30 - Charlene, Max and Mera Cross

Flowers

March 2 - Charlotte Wood
March 9 - Shirley Raymond
March 16 - Erika Subocz
March 23 - Charlene Cross
March 30 - Marcia Sullivan

Church Office Contact Info

Office Email - westhamptonchurchucc@comcast.net

Church office phone - 413-527-4204

Church website - www.westhamptonchurchucc.org

Facebook - Westhampton Congregational
United Church of Christ

For pastoral care and emergencies
please contact the church office.

Church's Snow Cancellation Policy

Occasionally during the winter months it becomes necessary for us to cancel in person Sunday morning worship for safety reasons and moving it to Zoom only. In the event of a cancellation, the announcement will be added to TV stations WWLP and WGGB's list of cancellations that stream along the bottom of the television screen continually throughout the morning.



Regular Town Meetings/Office Hours

Mon.	9:00 - 3:00pm	Administrative Asst - Town Hall
	7:00pm	SelectBoard (bi-weekly) - Town Hall
Tues.	8am - 3:00pm	Board of Health – Annex
	9am - 3:00pm	Administrative Asst - Town Hall
	by appt only	Building Inspector – Annex
	4:30 - 8:30pm	Board of Assessors - Annex
	6:00pm	Fire Dept.(1 st , 3 rd) – PSC
	6:00pm	Friends of the Library(1 st) - Library
	6:00pm	Library Trustees (2 nd) - Library
	6:30pm	Planning Board (2 nd) – Annex
	7:00pm	Zoning Bd of Appeals (2 nd) – Annex
	7:00pm	Historical Commission (3 rd) – Judd Rm
Wed.	8am - 4:00pm	Town Clerk - Town Hall
	8am - 3:00pm	Board of Health – Annex
	9am - 3:00pm	Administrative Asst - Town Hall
	6pm - 8:00pm	Transfer Station hours
	7:00pm	Conservation (1 st , 3 rd) – Town Hall
Thurs.	9am - 3:00pm	Administrative Asst - Town Hall
	10am - 12pm	Board of Assessors – Annex
	8am - 3:00pm	Board of Health – Annex
Fri.	7:00pm	AA (weekly) – Church dining room
Sat.	9am - 3:00pm	Transfer Station hours
	By appt only	Tax Collector

Westhampton's new website is now:

www.WesthamptonMA.gov

Burning Permits

Brush burning season is allowed in Westhampton between January 15 to May 1. The Town of Westhampton only allows burning on Saturdays and Sundays between the hours of 10am - 4pm with a valid permit and approval. **To obtain a burning permit, you must submit the request ONLINE** at <https://westhamptonma.gov/departments/fire-department/>, the Fire Department's section of the town website (or from the home page, you can find the Fire Dept under the Governance tab). There you can read rules and regulations about open burning, **but the Request an Open Burning Permit tab will ONLY be visible and available on Saturdays and Sundays between 7 – 10am.** Click that request tab, fill in your contact info, agree to the rules and regulations, then click Submit. You will see an immediate response online, but no email will be sent. Information will be posted on the Fire Department's homepage as to whether or not burning is allowed that day.

IF you can't do this process online, there is a phone call option ONLY between 7 - 8am the morning you wish to burn, you call the Fire Department non-emergency number - 413-529-7181. Permits will not be issued by phone to anyone calling after 8am.

The Department reserves the right to inspect any burning site at any time and to revoke the permit if terms and conditions of outdoor burning are not being followed.



Burning Permit

Message from Stewardship:
“Ash Wednesday Wake-Up Call”

“Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” With these ancient words from Genesis 3:19 and the swipe of a dirty thumb across our foreheads, Ash Wednesday propels us into the season of Lent with the proper context to understand our lives as stewards of all that God entrusts to us.

The essential teaching of Ash Wednesday – that we are just mortals, after all – crushes our ego, dispels our pretensions and drives us deep into God’s mysteries. Why are we here? What are our lives all about? What’s really important? Pray over these questions and profound insights emerge.

We are dust. Yes, but we are God’s dust. Our body consists of trillions of atoms, each one a speck of “dust” created by of God, billions of years ago. God put us together from the very stuff of the universe.

- Therefore, we are quite literally “earthy” beings, made of the same material as air, water, soil and stone. Part of creation, we work to preserve and sustain the health of God’s.
- Therefore, we have reverence for our bodies, expressed through healthy.

We are breath. We are “dust,” but not only dust. We are “dust” into which God has “breathed the Holy breath of life” (Genesis 2:7).

- Therefore, every breath we take is holy. Every breath is a prayer that reminds us of God’s life force in us.
- Therefore, we look to God to align our lives and ourselves with God’s holy reality that arcs towards peace, love, joy, justice and truth.

Our time is brief. Because our “dust” will return to the earth, we live a finite number of minutes on earth.

- Therefore, every hour, every second is sacred. We spend our time wisely, carefully, prayerfully.
- Therefore, we do not cling to our possessions, knowing that we only hold onto them for a little while.
- Therefore, we nourish our lives with world treasures of real value – friendships, trust, love, joy, service, generosity and harmony.

This Lent spend time in prayer, with openness and honesty. See how God will turn your heart and mind, transforming you into the person you were created to be. Reflect each day on Ash Wednesday. “Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” ~ Rob Blezard

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	YTD Actual 2/20/25	YTD Budget 2/20/25
Pledged Local	9,840	16,470
Non-Pledged Local	2,287	1,500
Other Local	2,437	4,700
TOTAL LOCAL	14,564	22,670
Mission Pledged	844	1,787
Special Offerings	300	1122
TOTAL MISSIONS	1144	2909

Ash Wednesday Service



Please join us for our Ash Wednesday Worship Service on Wednesday, March 5 @ 7:00pm at the church. Rev. Chris Mereschuk will lead the somber service that will include the imposition of ashes.

Lenten Discussion Gathering

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, March 5, marking the beginning of the season of Lent, a time of reflection and prayer. Sue Tracy Small would like to initiate a Lenten discussion gathering, possibly using the book “Turning Over the Tables: a Lenten Call for Disrupting Power”, but is also open to other ideas. If anyone is interested, please email Sue at suetouchet@email.com with some suggested dates/times and she will be in touch if it comes together.

Our Outreach Programs

Food Pantry - The Food Pantry is open to all to supplement your needs. You may stop by to pick up what you need, and we invite you to donate items as well. The Food Pantry is located in the basement of the Westhampton Church, accessible from the door facing North Road. *Hours of operation are every Wednesday from 5 - 6pm, Friday from 11am - 12noon, and Saturday from 9 - 10am.* Volunteers are always welcome to help with various tasks of opening/closing and staffing the space. You can volunteer or find more info on the Food Pantry at www.westhamptonchurchcc.org.

Take & Eat - The Take and Eat program is a non-denominational effort that serves elder and home-bound in need, by preparing and delivering weekend meals for up to 100 clients. Please visit www.tinyurl.com/takeandeat to sign up for the February 21 meal preparation and delivery.

Big Y Gift Card Fundraiser

Mikki Nevins, Pat Miller, and Jackie Didier are in charge of the church’s new Big Y Gift Card fundraising opportunity to help the church raise money by purchasing Big Y gift cards once a month, in any amount. Orders and payments will be taken monthly by Mikki Nevins at the church at coffee hour following worship **on 2nd Sundays**, and your purchased gift cards will be distributed at church during coffee hour the following week on 3rd Sundays. If you cannot come in person, you may give your order and payment to Mikki Nevins prior to the 2nd Sunday deadline, and likewise, if you cannot come in person to pick up your gift card, you may contact Mikki and make arrangements to pick up your card at her house. Mikki’s contact info: mikjnev@yahoo.com; 413-977-9222; 63 South Rd, Westhampton.

This is an easy way to put a little extra money into the church budget since many of us shop at Big Y anyway. You receive the full value of the gift card and the church makes 5% on every sale. Please consider shopping with a gift card regularly!





CE - Faith Formation Worship is for ALL ages!

Sunday worship is for everyone - we hope you will join us!

When you arrive at either the front or accessible side entrance, you will be greeted by someone who can answer your questions and direct you to wherever you need to go. Accessible restrooms are at the back of the church and our worship space is upstairs. While our sanctuary is on the second floor, we have an elevator and someone ready to assist anyone in need.

Besides the cushioned pews, there are a few straight backed and rocking chairs in the rear of the sanctuary, and there are hearing assistance devices and large print Bibles and hymnals available. Music is an important part of our worship services! Joining your voice with others is an amazing way to decrease stress and form social bonds.

We love to have children participate in worship! There are "Worship Bags" available which contain objects to help young folks actively follow along and participate throughout the service... such as a battery-powered candle, bookmark, paper and crayons, small offering envelope, and a dancing ribbon. There is also a "pray space" in a front corner of the sanctuary, designed for children to be able to easily see what's going on and participate while still being able to move about and interact with quiet play items, such as coloring sheets, lacing cards, finger mazes, building blocks, and puppets. During the service each week, there is a Moment for All Ages, when a member of the congregation leads a short age-appropriate discussion, story, or activity that relates to the topic of the weekly scripture. Starting in March and lasting throughout Lent, there will also be a separate children's bulletin containing activities related to the scripture.

If something keeps you from being able to attend in person, we also host a live Zoom meeting so you can still be a part of the communal gathering virtually. The Zoom Meeting ID is 321 069 9076, and the Passcode is 248423. If you prefer to click a link, please visit <https://www.westhamptonchurchucc.org/> where you will find that information

After worship ends, everyone is welcome to a time of fellowship downstairs. There are snacks, hot and cold drinks, birthday and anniversary recognitions, and plenty of time and space to relax and visit. What a great way to refresh our hearts, minds, and spirits for the start of each new week!

Family Night of BINGO!

Mark your calendars and save the date the evening of *Friday, April 4!* The CE Committee of the Westhampton Church cordially invites all to a Family Night of BINGO to be held in the church dining room. BIG fun!



Women's Fellowship Annual Banquet with Chef Fletcher - March 8



Our annual Women's Fellowship Banquet will take place on **Saturday, March 8 @ 6:00pm SHARP** in the church dining room. And our favorite gourmet chef, Fletcher Nehring will again delight our taste buds with his delicious meal creations. His menu is always a surprise...and always a delight! *At the Chef's request, dinner will be served promptly at 6:00pm; be sure to plan accordingly and arrive early enough - you won't want to miss the first course!* Reservations are necessary, so please RSVP to the church office no later than Monday, March 3 by emailing westhamptonchurchucc@comcast.net or calling 413-527-4204 and leaving a message. The cost is \$5 per person, due that evening. Following the meal, we will be entertained by Bill Sbrega, a pianist who often performs for the Lathrop Communities.



Good Works Group

The Good Works group met the Wednesday after the February school vacation at the Westhampton Public Library. The group did a number of cleaning/organizing chores at the library. Good to get a start on spring cleaning! It is always wonderful to work with our fabulous librarian, Meaghan Schwelm. We also sent Valentines to Westhampton residents who are in their golden years. I've heard that it was really nice for them to get something fun in the mail in the middle of winter. In March, we will be planting seeds for May plantings around town. Spring is coming! Good Works dates for the remainder of the year: March 19, April 16, and May 21. Email Sarah Madden with any questions or ideas: sjbmadden23@gmail.com.

WES PTO

The WES PTO is springing into a busy month. We would like to send a big Thank you to everyone who purchased a calendar for our raffle; it was a very successful fundraiser! Each day for the month of March a winner is picked. There are some great prizes; good luck to all the participants! Boomer the Springfield Thunderbirds mascot came to visit us on Feb 28th to get everyone excited for our Thunderbirds Family Night on Saturday March 8th. There may be some tickets left if you're interested in joining us! Our next Zoom meeting is Monday, March 3rd @ 7pm. If you have any questions for the PTO feel free to reach out to us at wes.pto.news@gmail.com. Happy Spring!

Council on Aging Luncheon Program Second Thursday at 12 noon at the Church Fourth Grade Talent Show - March 13

It is that time of year again! Ms. Overstreet and the Fourth Grade at Westhampton Elementary School will join us for a pizza lunch on March 13. After lunch, we will be treated to the dazzling talents of the students. Grandparents and other family members are especially welcome, and we always make space for family members from out-to-town to join us.

And looking ahead... the April Luncheon program on April 10 will focus on Nutrition. After a winter of comfort food, many of us are looking forward to tips for healthy eating with Brandon Walton from Highland Valley Elder Services.

At the Westhampton Library

Hours: Mon/Thurs 2-8pm; Tues/Wed 9am-12pm & 1-5pm; Sat 10am-1pm.

Please check the town website or Facebook or Instagram @WesthamptonPublicLibrary for library updates.

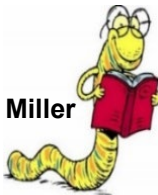
The library is open for in-person browsing and materials pickup as well as curbside pickup.

To place a request for curbside pick-up, please email westhampton@cwmares.org or call 413-527-5386.

Recurring Programs . . .

(Holidays may impact schedule)

- **COA Computer Class is back with Bob Miller**
2nd / 4th Mondays @ 10am-12pm
- **Knitting Group Mondays @ 6pm**
- ***Yoga Mondays @ 6pm.** *Yoga is drop-in, first-come/first-served, and registration is not required. Please check Facebook and the town calendar for updates on yoga at the library.
- **Scrabble Group Tuesdays @ 2pm**
- **Book Group 4th Tuesdays @ 7pm BUT...** We will be meeting on January 7th at 7pm to accommodate the holidays – see separate article for book details.)
- **Walk-in Wellness Clinics: W'ton's Public Health Nurse 1st/3rd Weds @ 10-11:30am**
- **Coffee & Chat – Wednesdays @ 10am-12pm**



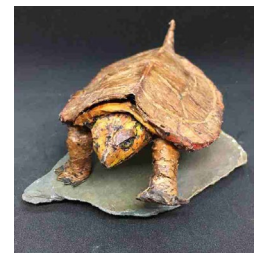
For Kids and Teens...

- **CFCE Playgroup – Tuesdays @ 10am**
- **Storytime - Wednesdays @ 10:30am**
- **CFCE Family Yoga Classes with Lorrie - Saturday, March 1 and Saturday April 5 from 10:30am - 12pm.**
*Please email Jessica at jloud@collaborative.org to register.
- **CFCE Eating Healthy Together - Saturday, March 15 from 10:30am - 11:30am.** Join Jessica from the HRSD and Angela from the EFC CFCE Playgroups for a morning of play and conversation about nutrition, easy healthy meals and the joys and struggles of feeding little ones. Registration is required. Please email Jessica at jloud@collaborative.org.
- **After School Fun Thursdays @ 3:30pm – Fun activities every Thursday this month after school!**
 - 1st Thursdays – LEGO Club
 - 2nd Thursdays – Craft Club
 - 3rd Thursdays – Nintendo Switch Happy Hour
 - 4th Thursdays – Comics Club
 - 5th Thursdays – Board Games
- **Teen Craft Night – 3rd Thursdays at 6pm: March 20.** This month's craft is a cloud light. Materials are limited to 8 participants and registration is required. Please register by emailing Emily at ewayne@cwmares.org. Special thanks to the Friends of Westhampton Library and the Lyn Keating Program Fund for sponsoring all teen crafts.

February/March Artist - Jim Crowell

Jim Crowell's art continues through the month of March. Jim Crowell, of Hatfield, is a maker. Now retired from professional cabinetry and finish carpentry, Jim continues to make, creating sculpture, vessels, and bas relief wall pieces that reflect his deep interests in nature and the natural world. Birch bark is his primary material.

Trained in woodworking techniques in his native Florida, Jim Crowell moved from Boston to Hatfield in 1982 and eventually established himself as the consummate local craftsman. He worked as a cabinetmaker, woodworker, and finish carpenter in historic restoration projects for many years, both self-employed and for various local contractors. Jim became well known for his artistry, creativity, and problem-solving skills on the job and in the field. With this body of work, Jim combines his skills as a woodworker with his artistic vision.



Irish Music with Chris & Katie LaFond

Saturday, March 8 @ 10:30 - 11:30am

A celebration of Irish music! Join us as we perform a whole set of music dedicated to the spirit of Ireland. With harp, flute, guitar, and voice, Chris & Katie delight and rouse the spirit with a mix of traditional and modern Celtic and American music that reconnect us both to Celtic heritage and to the Earth.



Katie is a graduate of the Hartt School of Music and also holds a Master's Degree in Flute Performance from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. She is a music teacher by day and a super fiber magic-worker by night. Her wind quintet, Maestras, released the CD *Sweethearts* in 2020. www.maestrasmusic.com. Chris plays multiple stringed instruments, with Celtic harp as his focus for the last twenty-five years. *Garden Concert* is Chris's CD of Celtic music with his Pilgrim Harp Trio www.celticharper.net. One or both of them perform at festivals, celebrations, and gatherings up and down the East Coast, and occasionally beyond.

Westhampton Permaculture Club

Thursday, March 27 @ 7 - 8pm

You're invited to the inaugural meeting of the Westhampton Permaculture Club (WPC), a bimonthly discussion group of do-it-yourself-ers who try to rely as much as possible on local resources. Permaculture is "an approach to land management and settlement design that adopts arrangements observed in flourishing natural ecosystems. It includes a set of design principles derived using whole-systems thinking. It applies these principles in fields such as regenerative agriculture, town planning, rewilding, and community resilience" (Wikipedia). Its goal is "permanent" as opposed to throw-away culture. We'll generate maps of where we live on MassMap, the state's cartography database. It's a primary source of facts about local resources and infrastructures. We'll discover the various kinds of maps we can generate through use of overlays—including our own yards and its geology. You'll leave with a deeper understanding of where we live, and a tool to dig even deeper with.

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PERMIT No. 6



The Bell Tower is a church and community newsletter whose intent is to inform and inspire. The Bell Tower shall promote the identity, programs and events of the Westhampton Congregational United Church of Christ. As an added service, the Bell Tower shall also provide information on community news and events to the residents of Westhampton. We invite you to join us for Sunday Morning Worship at 10:00am. Submissions to the Bell Tower for church and community articles and announcement may be sent to Julie Holt at the church email address westhamptonchurchucc@comcast.net no later than the 15th of each month prior to the upcoming Bell Tower issue.

Westhampton Congregational United Church of Christ Mission Statement

With God as our witness, we of the Westhampton Congregational United Church of Christ, commit to our Savior Jesus Christ as our model and guide. While cherishing our heritage, we look to the future, accepting ourselves and each other as individuals uniquely created in God's image. We covenant together to grow in our understanding of God's will. We nurture each other in faith so we may be empowered to serve in our community and the world.

We are called to love our brothers and sisters as God loves us, freely and without reservation. Our unconditional love is inclusive of all God's people. We denounce acts of discrimination and violence against any person. As an open and affirming church, we joyfully welcome all people into our community of faith, regardless of age, gender, race, sexual orientation, ethnic background, socioeconomic status or physical/mental abilities. Each person is invited and encouraged to participate in all aspects of our church life and ministry.



Easter Flower Dedications

On Easter Sunday, the church sanctuary will once again be graced by beautiful Easter flowers. At the conclusion of the service, these flowers will be distributed to our older Westhampton residents, as well as families who have had a recent death or illness. We ask for donations of \$14 to help defray the expense of the flowers, making a dedication in honor or in memory of a loved one. Dedications will be included in the Sunday bulletin on

Easter, April 20. The Holiday Flower Task Team will accept contributions and dedications until *Palm Sunday, April 13*. Please turn in this form along with your donation by bringing or mailing to the church at 1 Tob Road, Westhampton MA 01027. Checks should be made payable to the church.

List my dedication in the Easter Bulletin as follows:

In memory of: _____

In honor of: _____

Given by: _____ Amt. enclosed: _____



PSALM 30:5