

First Congregational Church Weekly Newsletter

East Longmeadow, MA

March 4, 2026



PASTORAL MEDITATION by Reverend Thomas Hawkins

MARCH, MONTH OF MANY WEATHERS, WILDLY COMES

So much for these first days of March announcing an end to winter's ice and snow. As I write these words on Tuesday afternoon, snow is softly drifting down onto mountains of previously fallen snow, which is already piled as high as my head. March typically disappoints our hopes for an early spring. It teases us with a few mild days and then shuffles back into late winter's cold and snow like Punxsutawney Phil into his Groundhog Day's den. As Charles Dickens observed of March in *Great Expectations*, "March is that month when the sun shines warmly but the wind blows cold." It is the month when sunshine streams warmly through my car's windshield, forcing me to remove a heavy winter coat, only to have a cold wind demand that I slip back into it as I step outside the car.

The vernal equinox falls around March 20, announcing the first day of astronomical spring. But the first day of spring and the first spring day are almost never the same.

To add to March's misery, on this coming Sunday, March 8, our clocks will "spring forward" one hour as we shift to Daylight Savings Time. We will lose one hour sleep. One hour doesn't sound like a lot; but it takes a toll on our health and well-being. According to experts, in the week immediately after the shift to daylight saving time, the incidence of heart attacks and strokes significantly increases. So do motor vehicle accidents. Just when winter's snow and cold won't let go, March confronts us with the additional challenge of adjusting to Daylight Savings Time.

March is named for the Roman god, Mars, the god of war. It belongs to Mars because it signaled the start of combat between rival powers. In the ancient Mediterranean world, March was the month when the ground dried enough for soldiers and war chariots to take to the field and begin spring military campaigns of conquest and plunder. March, 2028, proves that not much has changed between ancient empires and modern republics. Current world leaders, like Rome's emperors, are honoring March's namesake, Mars, not with legionnaires and war chariots but with bombs and missiles falling all over the Middle East.

The early Angles and Saxons who migrated into the British Isles in the fifth and sixth centuries were familiar neither with Latin names for the months nor with Roman deities. These Germanic tribes knew nothing about a division of the year called "March." They instead called our month of "March" by a number of different names. None of them were ultimately adopted for general use, however. One of these early Saxon names was *Hlyd*, which literally meant "loud" or "wild." I like the name *Hlyd*. It speaks to the wild, loud winds that blow through leafless March trees. I laid awake recently listening to the wind wildly howling through the trees that surround our house. It sounded as if a locomotive was roaring past our windows. The wind was *Hlyd* – loud and wild.

This wild, fickle March weather seems to have inspired the 19th-century English poet John Clare. In his *The Shepherd's Calendar* he describes March as:

March, month of 'many weathers,' wildly comes
In hale and snow and rain and threatening hums
And floods: while oft at his cottage door
The shepherd stands to hear the distant roar.

March is wild and loud. It is a month filled with the clash and conflict of the weather's competing cold fronts and warming sunshine. On the other hand, it's a foregone conclusion that March's changeable weather will eventually surrender to April showers and May flowers. We can trust that daffodils and tulips, green grass and flowering dogwoods will soon arrive at our doorsteps. The birds that have been silent these long winter months will soon begin to sing their mating songs amid greening trees. The poetry found in the Bible's *The Song of Songs* promises us that less wild and more mild weather is on the way:

*For now the winter is past. The rain over and gone.
The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come;
and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land.
The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom.
They give forth fragrance.
Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. (2:11-13)*

Blessings,
Pastor Thomas

SUNDAY WORSHIP in the sanctuary or livestream link: <http://www.facebook.com/churchontherotary/>

Daylight Saving Time (DST) in 2026 begins on March 8. Clocks "spring forward" on Sunday, March 8

SPIRITUAL TYPES WORKSHOP - March 15 in Butler Fellowship Hall

Psychologists tell us that we all have different "information processing" styles. Some of us take in information by hearing it. Others of us process information through reading it. Still others; by using visual methods like diagrams, pictures, or graphs. Educators are taught that different students have different "learning" styles. Some are visual learners who learn new material best using charts and graphic organizers. Others learn best through reading new material or writing information down for themselves. Still others are "aural/auditory" and learn best by hearing and speaking.

Did you know there are also different spiritual types or styles? Some writers have nine of them; others identify 12. One of the easiest models uses four styles of spiritual or religious orientation. Having a sense of these types is helpful because it helps us better understand ourselves and what kinds of experiences or spiritual disciplines help us grow and which ones are more of a stretch for us. Also, every strength if used to an excess can become a weakness or block to our growth. Wholeness is growing to appreciate and draw on all pathways to God, not just the one most familiar or most comfortable.

Want to learn more? Pastor Thomas will be facilitating a workshop on "Knowing Your Spiritual Type" on Sunday, March 15, from 12:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. We will begin with a light soup and salad lunch following coffee hour (which gives us an opportunity to have dessert before our meal!). The workshop will then begin at 1:00 p.m. and conclude at 2:30 p.m.

A sign-up list is posted in the breezeway. Question? Speak to Pastor Thomas

A search committee for a new Music Director is needed. Please contact the church if you are interested in participating in our search for our new Music Director.

OUR LOVE OFFERING TO THE WORLD

For over 75 years, the One Great Hour of Sharing Offering (OGHS) has been helping Christians bring hope and healing to hurting people both in the US and around the world.

OGHS's mission is to support domestic and international development, fight poverty and its consequences, bring aid and relief to communities torn by war or ravaged by national disaster, provide advocacy and resettlement assistance for refugees and displaced persons, and combat injustice in its many forms. OGHS provides funding and hands-on assistance in collaboration with local and international partners.

Your offering helps rebuild from disaster, feed the hungry, provide clean water to the thirsty, empower the oppressed and restore hope.

There is always a need, but can there be a better time than now to support this program through the United Church of Christ. Envelopes are placed in the pews if you choose to make a donation over the next few weeks. Thank you.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Your Mission and Outreach team has an opening. This is a wonderful opportunity for you to join us in doing the important work supporting various needs in our community and the world. It is an extremely joyful, rewarding experience.

We usually meet the first Monday of each month at 10:00 in the church library but we are happy to meet on Sundays after coffee hour if that time works better for you. We welcome your interest and we would love to answer any of your questions.

PRAYER

As we approach St. Patrick's Day with its parades and festivities, here is a contemporary Celtic prayer by Scottish poet and spiritual writer, John Philip Newell.

You are above us, O God. You are within.

You are in all things yet contained by no thing.

Teach us to seek you in all that has life that we may see you as the Light of life.

Teach us to search for you in our own depths that we may find you in every living soul. Amen.



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