



MESSENGER
of the
**First Congregational
Church**
United Church of Christ
Melrose, Massachusetts

An Open and Affirming Congregation

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Sabbatical Review

It was my privilege on a recent Sunday to present the results of my recent sabbatical time to an open meeting after church with the Board of Deacons and the Board of Trustees. I also have had the opportunity to continue the discussion at the fall meeting of the Pastoral Relations Committee. A written copy of the report is available in the Narthex or in the church office.

Since some of the topics raised have been the impetus for great discussion, I would like to highlight some of the salient features of this report here and make sure everyone knows that my office is open to bat ideas around. In fact, the goal of the sabbatical report is not to nail down tight goals to be achieved over specific timelines. It is rather to invite wider congregational discussion in order that we might become less reactive and more deliberate in our shared ministry.

I utilized the sabbatical time to outline the purposes of the local church, the unique demographics of our Melrose setting, and how First Congregational Church addresses the purposes of the local church in that setting.

The purpose of the local church is to extend the ministry of Jesus Christ through spiritual formation, outreach, education, and community building. In Melrose, a middle-class, predominately Roman Catholic city that has experienced a shift in population from established to newer residents who commute into Boston, our church achieves these purposes through Sunday worship, outreach ministries, Sunday School and youth ministries, and ministries of compassion that take various forms. We are blessed with a healthy church that has strong Sunday attendance, a large Sunday School, a diverse music ministry and active lay leadership.

Of the many aspects of our church life, I honed in on Christian Education, spiritual formation, mission work, and liturgical life as areas for focused consideration as we move into the future. With regard to Christian Education, it is my belief that we need to continue to solidify our Sunday School leadership structure, develop a budgetary strategy for supporting a C.E. Director staff position, and intentionally promote our Sunday School to the wider community. It would also be helpful to refine the church's relationship to adult

Sunday, November 1, 2009

Food Pantry Sunday

Renewing the Covenant

9:00 AM – Senior Choir Rehearsal

10:00 AM – WORSHIP

and Church School Pre-K – 12

11:15 AM – Coffee Hour, Narthex

11:15 AM – Youth Meeting for those interested in Mission Trip. Bring specific ideas about possible trip locations, including cost. Adults welcome!

11:15 AM – Winter Wonderland Fair meeting, lounge

11:15 AM – Finance Committee Meeting

11:15 AM – Music Director Search Committee Mtg.

THE FLOWERS are given by Susan Getchell in memory of her parents and her brother, Richard.

DURING THE WEEK

Saturday, October 31

Daylight Savings Time Ends

– Turn your clocks BACK

Tuesday, November 3

RIM Meeting, Seminar Room

Wednesday, November 4

7:15 PM – Bells Rehearsal, sanctuary

Thursday, November 5

7:30 PM – Deacons and Trustees at the Packhams'



Daylight-Saving Time Ends

Christian education (at the moment this is something that many seem to want but few attend when it is offered).

In the area of spiritual formation, I think we should develop a greater awareness among parishioners about existing opportunities and remind folks that it is not just what the church offers but what the parishioner brings that fosters this formation. We should also consider a spirituality retreat and engage in discussion around our dwindling attendance at seasonal, mid-week services.

As for our liturgical life, it would be worthwhile to explore the possibility of an alternative (ecumenical) worship service that departs from a standard order of service. We also need to involve more of the congregation—especially our youth—in our Sunday morning liturgy. We also do a great deal in the area of mission work and it would be well to organize these efforts for marketing purposes to the wider community. It is also important to reinforce a broader definition of “mission work” to include worship itself.

These are some broad highlights of the report. It is an exciting time for our church. Any changes we make as we look ahead will be done from a place of health rather than recovery. I look forward to further discussion and am grateful for the sabbatical the church afforded me this past summer.

See you in church,

Rev. Dominic



Jennie Way, Flo Hall, Marilyn McComas, Betty Crane, Kate Watson, Anne Wing, George Burrell, Bud Pendleton, Barbara Jones.



† *Our sincerest sympathy and prayers are with the family and friends of Kay Bemiss, who passed away on October 24th. Her funeral was held here at the church on October 28th.*

The following groups meet here regularly:

- Boy Scouts** – Tuesdays at 7:00 PM in the basement
- Girl Scouts** – Sundays at 5:30 PM, Rm. 1 and lounge, Mon. at 7 PM, Rm. 7/8, Wed. at 6PM, Rm.7/8, Fridays 2:30 and 5PM, 7/8
- Pre-PAL** – 9 11:30 AM – M, T, Th, Fri, Room 7
- PAL** – 3:00 PM, Room 7/8
- Cub Scouts** – Wednesdays, 3rd Thursday
- Al-Anon** – weekdays at 12 noon, Sunday at 1 & 7 PM – Rm. 8
- Blue of a Kind** – Mondays at 7:00 PM in the Music Room
- S.A.R.P.** – Tuesdays at 6:30 PM, lounge
- A.W.O.L.** – Tuesdays at 7:30 PM, 7/8, lounge, Rm. 1
- Mothers' Group** meets Wednesdays 9-11 AM, lounge, 1, 7/8
- CODA** – Wednesdays at 7:30 PM, lounge
- Vital Cycles** - Thursdays at 7:00 PM, lounge
- O.A.** – Fridays at 7 PM, lounge
- A.A.** – Wednesdays at 7:30 PM, Fridays at 8:00 PM and Saturdays at 3:00 PM – Rm. 8

LOOK WHAT'S COMING!.....SOON!

What: Winter Wonderland Fair

Where: First Congregational Church

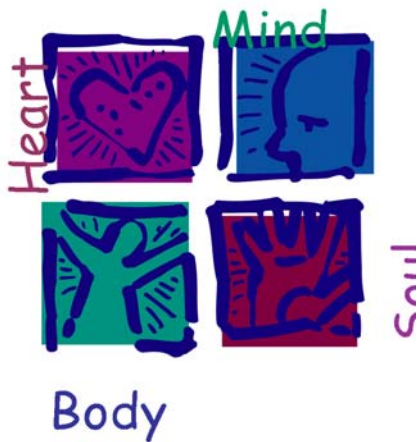
When: Friday, Dec. 4, 6-9pm
Saturday, Dec. 5, 9am-2pm

Who: The entire congregation and wider community are invited.

How to get involved: Come to the next planning meeting. **Sunday, November 1st in the Lounge.**



**FOOD PANTRY SUNDAY
November 1, 2009**



HALLMARK HEALTH

A Caregivers Support Group geared towards adults taking care of a parent family member, or friend is being held on the first and third Monday of every month from 6:00 PM to 7:30 PM at the Dutton Adult Day Health Center at 1117 Main St. in Wakefield. Light refreshments will be served. The Support Group is being sponsored in part through a grant from Mystic Valley Elder Services. Registration is suggested, as seating is limited. Call Hallmark Health VNA and Hospice at 781-338-7902 for more information or to register.

Hallmark Health VNA and Hospice is making gift purchasing this year a lot easier. Unique, one-of-a-kind gifts will be available at the Hallmark Health Hospice Artisan Fair on Saturday, November 7th from 10-3 PM at the Americal Civic Center, 467 Main St. in Wakefield. The Fair, a benefit for Hallmark Health Hospice Programs, will feature artisan's handmade jewelry, pottery, furniture, paper journals, glass-blown pieces, photographs, paintings, and so much more. A silent auction of items by participating artisans will also be held. Admission is free with plenty of parking for all. Vendors of all crafts are welcomed to participate. To participate or for more information, please contact Janet Perault at 781-338-7902.

It's Pledge Time

A Stewardship Moment

As I wrote this, my first thought was, “How can I define what this place means to me?” What do I get here that keeps me coming back? I started listing the tangible things, Vacation Bible School, coffee hour, the music & sermon each week; and while all these things have real value, I felt I still had not answered my question. There was something more. I wanted a big, dramatic statement. A story of generations who came to this Church, the striking moment when it all became clear. But it wasn't there. No single moment defined this place to me, and I struggled.

As I continued to reflect, the closest I could come to identifying that ONE thing, was the first time I came here. Amber was working, and planned to join us after the service. So I came in, just me and the kids and I let them choose our seats. Of course, we ended up in the second row, directly behind Dominic. As the service started, it was all I could do to keep the kids somewhat quiet and a tiny bit still. There was pushing, wiggling, talking and the usual “he's poking me.” At the point of maximum stress, Dominic turned around. I thought I was going to get kicked out of church on my first visit. But he leaned over and said quietly - “flying solo is tough, you're doing a great job.” How many places do you find that instant acceptance? How much is that worth and can you even put a price on it? With this, I thought I was getting closer to what I wanted to say, but I still sought something more.

About two weeks ago I was on a plane, waiting to take off. I was trying to get those last emails out before I had to shut down, when I looked up. I was lost in thought about the day, but I noticed an older woman making her way down the aisle. I could see she was staring at the overhead bin next to me as she walked. I remembered Dominic's story about the experiment. When seminary students stepped over the man in need in their hurry to get to their

appointment. So I got up and put her luggage in the overhead bin. It took, at most, 15 seconds but she was so thankful and happy that I felt like the king of the world.

That started me thinking of other times when this place has changed me. Changed the way I think about something or changed my actions in some way. I realized that it doesn't take that one dramatic moment to fundamentally change who we are. A series of small changes adds up over time until you realize that you aren't who you were. That is what I get from this place and it is impossible to put a value on but I know that whatever we decide to pledge this year, I'm underpaying for what I get from this place.

When I say “this place” - I obviously don't mean the building. After all, it's burned down; twice. So why is it still here? It's here because those who came before us met the challenges they faced. The building burned down and they rebuilt. It burned down again and they rebuilt again. In many ways I think their challenge was easier because it was so obvious what they had to do. But what about all the other years when there wasn't such an obvious job to do? Every year since 1849, this church had to pay the heat bill, keep the lights on, meet payroll, pay for mission work and all the other things that have to be done. It's not as dramatic as rebuilding after the fire. No one is going to celebrate that in July of 1975 the Church once again met the challenge of paying the water bill, but that challenge is just as important as the rebuilding. If those who came before us failed in their tasks, we wouldn't be here. If we fail, this place won't be here for the next generation. And just like a series of small changes can have a huge effect on who we are as people, a small change in what we give to this place can have a dramatic effect on the strength of this Church.

Doug Orton

+ Christian Symbols +

Wheat

Wheat is used to represent the bread (the body of Christ) in Holy Communion. "I am the bread of life" (John 6:48).

In the parable of the wheat and the weeds (Matthew 13:24-30), Jesus uses wheat to represent believers, while weeds, or tares, represent unbelievers.



A prayer for pumpkin people

After Liz Curtis Higgs wrote the popular children's book *The Pumpkin Patch Parable*, people began

using her analogies to say a prayer while carving their Halloween pumpkins. The pumpkin prayer, a Christian alternative to Halloween traditions, reminds people of all ages what God has done for us. Use it this fall when your family makes jack-o'-lanterns.

- While cutting off the top of the pumpkin, pray, "Lord, open my mind so I can learn new things about you." (See Proverbs 1:7.)
- While removing the seeds and pulp, pray, "Remove the things in my life that don't please you. Forgive the wrong things I do, and help me forgive others." (See Matthew 6:14-15.)
- While making eyes, pray, "Open my eyes to see the beauty you've made in the world around me." (See Psalm 104:24.)
- While making the nose, pray, "I'm sorry for the times I've turned up my nose at your many gifts." (See James 1:17.)
- While making the mouth, pray, "Let everything I say please you." (See Psalm 19:14.)
- While lighting the candle, pray, "Lord, help me show your light to others through the things I do." (See Matthew 5:16.)

After carving your pumpkins, display them as examples of how God's love transforms us into new creations. (See 2 Corinthians 5:17.)