

News from the Pews

First Congregational Church/UCC
Ashfield, MA 01330

DECEMBER 2017

Minister's Moment

There's no doubt about it now: The cold is here to stay and Christmas is on the near horizon! If you thought the completion of Fall Festival activities meant the excitement of the season would slip into more predictable patterns, guess again! Stewardship efforts have led to the collection of 2018 pledges and if you're still considering how God may be calling you to contribute, please let someone know if you have any questions or other needs.

Last Sunday, November 26th, brought an opportunity to share some specifics about the way forward in shaping the interim process at First Church. Using the parable of the Ten Bridesmaids and their oil lamps from Matthew 25:1-13, I wanted to underscore how important it is to prepare for what's going to come next:

The development of a Transition Team to help gather the strands of Interim work and guide the congregation's overall process, is before us now. This group will help support the congregation's engagement with five developmental tasks: Coming to terms with history; Discovering a new identity; Allowing needed leadership changes; Reaffirming covenant with the UCC and ministry partners; and Commitment to new direction in ministry. Through a wide variety of means – meals, discussion groups, after-church gatherings, articles, and so on – these full-church conversations need your involvement in order to be effective so watch for what's coming!

Concentration on a couple of key questions before us were also something I discussed during worship on the 26th. As a Search Committee is formed sometime in the next year, there are three questions the Committee will want your help with as they draft written responses:

- Who are we now?
- Who is our neighbor?
- What is God calling us to do?

The time-line for interim work is already underway, but our next corporate efforts find their footing as we start 2018: In consultation with Rev. Kelly Gallagher, we will be calendaring events and moving toward the drafting of an in-depth look at the congregation, called the "church profile." With these preparations, we can plan for roughly 6 to 12 months of transition work and 6 to 12 months of Search Committee work.

Of course, our world does not stop spinning, as it orbits through the universe and winter deepens in our hemisphere. Welcome to the season of Advent; we have cycled back through the Christian calendar and with the first Sunday in December, we begin a new Christian year! We might do well to wish each other a 'happy new year,' for this is the time when we reach back in history to the time before Jesus was born. Lest we're tempted to think this brings us back to when it all began, not so fast! God's prophets and teachers down through time spoke of what was to come, and these promises are part of what Advent offers to reveal for us now.

Hope; Peace; Joy; Love. Come along as we share using the grand language of the Christian tradition during the four Sundays of Advent. Please take note of the many events taking place at First Church this month, (keep reading here in NFP) including plans to share in local **Christmas Caroling** on Sunday, December 17th, after worship and before dark (Save the date; hot chocolate planned!). Our **Christmas Pageant** will take place on Dec. 10th during the worship service, something not to be missed (Come to 9am rehearsals before worship on the 3rd and 10th). There are many sources of light in Advent, and your participation will definitely brighten them all.

Peace to everyone in a busy season.

Pastor Nada

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ABOUT OUR CHURCH

Pastor: Nada Blair Sellers
church 628-4470, Sunday morning
Worship is at 10:00am. Children and
Sunday School are concurrent with
Worship. The governing body of the
church is its members, who
traditionally gather the second
Sunday of March, June, September
and December at 11:30 am for the
Monthly Congregational Meeting. Call
or email the church clerk,
Wendy Pree (628-3875)
wendypree@gmail.com; or the
church moderator, Keith Obert
(625-0022), obert@aol.com) with any
issues/concerns you wish to include
on the agenda by the Wednesday
preceding the meeting.

FRIENDS AND MEMBERS ARE
WARMLY WELCOMED!

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DECEMBER CHOIR NEWS



The Choir is gearing up for a busy December!

A rich and varied program of music for Advent and Christmas will include the German carol "Still, Still, Still," "The Angel Gabriel," "Fanfare for Christmas Day" by Martin Shaw, songs of Mary, and early American Christmas music. Also planned is the well-known "Ave Maria" by Charles Gounod, with Octavia Crawford, Soprano soloist.

For information about joining either Adult Choir or Youth Choir, please call **Margery Heins, 625-8461**.

On December 10, when the Choir is off duty, special music for small vocal ensemble will be presented during the service by members of the Recital Chorus.

Choir Schedule*

Sun. Dec. 3: 9:00 Rehearsal; 10:00 Service
Weds. Dec. 6 and Sun. Dec. 10: No Choir
Weds. Dec. 13: 7:15 Rehearsal
Sun. Dec. 17: 9:00 Rehearsal; 10:00 Service
Weds. Dec. 20: 7:15 Rehearsal
Fri. Dec. 22: 7:15 Rehearsal
Sun. Dec. 24: 9:00 Rehearsal; 10:00 Service
Sun. Dec. 24: 6:30 p.m. Rehearsal;
7:30 Christmas Eve Service

CONCERTS OF INTEREST

Sunday, December 3, 2 pm *The Magic of the Organ*
North Hadley Congregational Church 243 River Drive, Hadley
Christopher White, Organ 1866 Johnson Tracker Pipe Organ
Classical works and a joyful Christmas sing-along
Tickets \$10.00 at the door -
benefit Organ Maintenance and Hadley Library

Friday, December 8, 12:15 pm *An Informal Holiday Program* - free
Greenfield Community College Main Lobby
Greenfield Community College Chorus
Margery Heins, Conductor
Marilyn Berthelette, Accompanist
Carols for the season with sing-along and refreshments

Saturday, December 9, 8 pm
The Recital Chorus *22nd Annual Holiday Concert*
Free - Donations (cash/check) for the Hilltown Churches Food Pantry
Trinity Church, Shelburne Falls
Margery Heins, Conductor
Amy Roberts-Crawford, Accompanist
Carols and seasonal songs from medieval times to the present.

HOLIDAY Bazaar Arts & Crafts Fair

Holiday Bazaar Reminders for Dec. 2-3

- Hours: Saturday 10-4 and Sunday 11-3
- please make dozens of Christmas cookies for us to sell and bring them to church either Friday afternoon or Saturday morning
- please volunteer to help us set up on Friday or help out on Saturday or Sunday (call **Caroline Murray** for details)
- please come and buy lots of wonderful gifts to help support the church.

SHARE THE WARMTH NEWS

Share the Warmth needs your unwanted winter clothing!

Our donations are way down! We are all out of winter jackets to give away. We have very little in our inventory. So please think about what you can give to us to give away to folks who come to use the Food Pantry. So please leave any donations at St. John's Church right inside the door which is open 24/7.

Thank you so much.

Caroline Murray 628-3954

II Corinthians 9:6-15 "...always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly..."

Poinsettias for Christmas

It's time to order poinsettias for Christmas. Please let me know how many plants you'd like to order, the color (red/pink/white), and if it is "in honor of"/ "in memory" of anyone.

Email (wendypree@gmail.com) or call (628-3875) with your order. Orders are due by Dec. 10th. Thanks. Wendy Prée



Hilltown Churches Food Pantry

Amazingly another year has passed and we are once again looking forward to our annual meeting. We invite all those interested to attend the pot luck luncheon on Saturday, January 20th, 2018 at noon at the church. This will be followed by our annual meeting. We especially invite all the wonderful volunteers who give so generously of their time and talents. Thank you all for offering a helping hand to those in need. I look forward to seeing you on the 20th.

Best wishes for a healthy and happy holiday season and new year.

Pat Thayer, President

From the Trustees:

End of Year Receipts

If you are owed any reimbursements for church-related expenses, please submit them to our Treasurer, Marie Fuller, no later than December 20 so they can be processed by the end of the year.

Treasurer to Retire

After more than six years of loyal and highly effective service as our church's Treasurer (as well as virtual office manager!), Marie Fuller is looking forward to a well-deserved retirement from the responsibilities of her role, effective June 30, 2018. Characteristic of Marie's thoughtfulness and care for our church, she is giving extended notice to us so we will have plenty of time to search for and orient a new treasurer.

Marie will be missed, but she is not leaving us, and she is offering to work with her replacement to coach him or her through the various phases of the year. This type of dedicated conscientiousness and caring for continuity is a hallmark of Marie's work, and for that -- over the last several years as well as the coming months -- we all applaud and celebrate. With deep gratitude, we all thank you, Marie, for all you have done and continue to do for our church.

Exterior Painting

Recently we decided to bring the painting of our church to a close for the season. We needed 50+ degree weather to prime and 40+ degree weather for top coat application, so as temperatures fell and rain and snow appeared, we realized any progress we made would be very marginal. The good news is that the Sheriff's Department assured us that their crew will return first thing in the spring to resume work.

Come to Discuss Capital Projects on December 10

As most of us are aware, we were very fortunate in exceeding our recent Capital Campaign's goal of \$300,000 by approximately \$48,000. Some small amount of this "overage" may be needed to cover any cost overruns we experience (although current capital campaign project costs seem to be largely on track). The question becomes what to do with the rest of the funds. The Trustees **invite you to our next quarterly congregational meeting on December 10** after church services to discuss this issue.

Background

When voting to go forward with the Capital Campaign at our annual meeting in January 2017, we provided the following guidance:

#10. What about the ideas of painting the outside of the church and paving the parking lot?

The costs related to reconfiguring the chancel and doing necessary changes to the organ chamber require that we rethink our capacity to do everything on our original list. Therefore, we recommend that we return the painting and paving projects to our operating budget, to be completed when funds become available. However, if our capital campaign goes over the top, these projects would be the first on the list.

#20. What happens if we vote in favor of the Capital Campaign and we exceed our goal of \$300,000? Will other projects be included? Who will decide?

There will be a Capital Campaign Executive Committee (CCEC) chaired by the Tri-Chairs (Annie Cheatham, Ted Murray, and Liz Van Guilder), and including other committee chairs. They will keep tabs on how the campaign is doing vis-a-vis the approved budget. If we overachieve (or underachieve), the CCEC will bring that information to the Trustees who can then decide whether to ask the congregation to vote to downsize projects, or do other things on our wish list.

Projects for Consideration

Though these excerpts could mean that the Trustees have full discretion, we think it is important that the Trustees consult with the congregation before we make any decisions. Here is a current list of some of the projects (with cost estimates where known) that have been nominated for funding, if and when monies become available:

Painting exterior of church (\$15,000+, of which we had estimated \$7,700 from an anonymous gift and our maintenance budget)
Paving driveway/parking lot (\$35,000+; we've applied for a \$25,000 grant)
Stenciling façade pipes of organ (\$15,000-\$35,000, with further research to be done)
Replacing windows in Fellowship Hall Additional storage shed in parking lot Expansion/modernization of kitchen
Selectively repairing/replacing siding of church Additional tables for tag sale, other church events
Remedial work to reduce basement humidity under sanctuary Weatherize front doors
Provide a water replenishment station ("bubbler") for refillable water flasks Refinish upper and lower Fellowship Hall floors
Excavate (?) and/or improve storage space under sanctuary

Your voice will be important in this discussion, so please join us December 10.

Improved Church Sound System Made possible by the Capital Campaign

The recently completed system is designed to provide increased clarity of the spoken word in our sanctuary, with minimal technological presence. The system also provides full-range reproduction of recorded music.

Features:

- One built-in cabinet houses all sound system electronics plus sub-woofer, unobtrusively. One wall switch (with pilot light) controls all power.
- Lectern/pulpit has hard-wired gooseneck microphone with on/off switch at base (green indicator light).
- Three floor boxes allow options for placement location.
- The three black boxes set into chancel floor each contain power receptacles, XLR microphone inputs, and auxiliary inputs for sound system amplification from sources such as computer, phone, mp3 player, etc.
- Two lightweight head-worn wireless mics with belt-clip transmitters, on/off switch and green indicator on transmitter.
- One handheld wireless mic, switch on bottom.
- Two high and mid-range frequency JBL speakers mounted on side sanctuary window frames.
- One low frequency subwoofer installed on floor of sound system cabinet.
- One master volume control located on back wall of sanctuary by thermostat.
- One small Mackie mixer board to control sound from center balcony.
- CD player in sound system cabinet.
- One small handheld digital audio recorder for recording sermons, etc.
- Five small speakers distributed throughout the church (narthex, dining room, green room, office, nursery).

Designed and installed in the fall of 2017 by Richard Prée and small church sound engineer, Michael Moscatelli.

Grand Canyon Winter Solstice

You are invited to experience musical and visual impressions of this most majestic place, that words cannot adequately describe. As the days get shorter the Capital Campaign Building Task Group invites you to a program of photographs and music inspired by the Grand Canyon, December 17, 5:00 pm. This event is an opportunity for you to hear the new sound system in our newly renovated sanctuary. Surround yourself with sound as we view hallowed ground.

For more info contact Richard Prée.



Make a Joyful Noise



From the Capital Campaign:

Is My Capital Campaign Pledge Really 90 Days Past Due?

Recently many of us received an update about the “Make a Joyful Noise” Capital Campaign. For those who made financial gifts or pledges, we enclosed a statement showing the status of your gift or pledge. Those who made a one-time gift had a “balance due” of zero.

But if you made a multi-year pledge, the statement showed any unpaid amount as “balance due” and a notation of “90 days past due.” Actually your pledge to the Capital Campaign is *not* “90 days past due.” You should simply ignore the “90 days” notation.

I saw the same notation on my statement, but it is a system-imposed term from QuickBooks that we were unable to modify. In my case, I paid 1/3 of my 3-year pledge this calendar year, but will wait until 2018 to pay my next 1/3, and then 2019 to pay my final 1/3. I recommend that you do the same — unless of course, you have made other arrangements for a payment schedule.

I hope this clarifies the situation, but if you should have any further questions, or I could help in any way, please feel free to contact me, Ted Murray (tel. 413-628-3954 or email tmurray@bu.edu).

Ted Murray, Tri-Chair, Capital Campaign

COFFEE HOUR MAGIC

I really enjoy Coffee Hour... that little piece of magic that follows our Worship Service.

MAGIC? Yes, because one never knows who will be there, who will be engaged in conversation, or **ABRA KADABRA**, what will be on the center table! Mostly, I just love the congenial spirit.

I believe hospitality to be an important ingredient of our church life. For years, the responsibility of Sunday refreshment has fallen upon the “Deacon of the Month” with a handful of loyal volunteers. As the church has grown, it is time to find a new model that will encourage more worker bees to bring a little something to the table; and/or to share in the cleanup once in a while. Contributing need not be overwhelming. Most Sundays are the result of “many hands making light work.”

Growing up, I watched the adults in our church kitchen doing these very same tasks. What impressed me most wasn't the work, it was their connection and they were having such a good time - and I wanted what they had.

At this moment, Rochelle Nahmias, Dan and I are trying to create teams or some sustainable structure to maintain our Sunday Magic Hour. We have a hearty list of folks who are willing to bring something to our table when asked. We just need some help getting ourselves organized.

If any of this intrigues you, perhaps with ideas, or you know how to get ducks lined up, please talk to us. We'd like a new model for the new year.

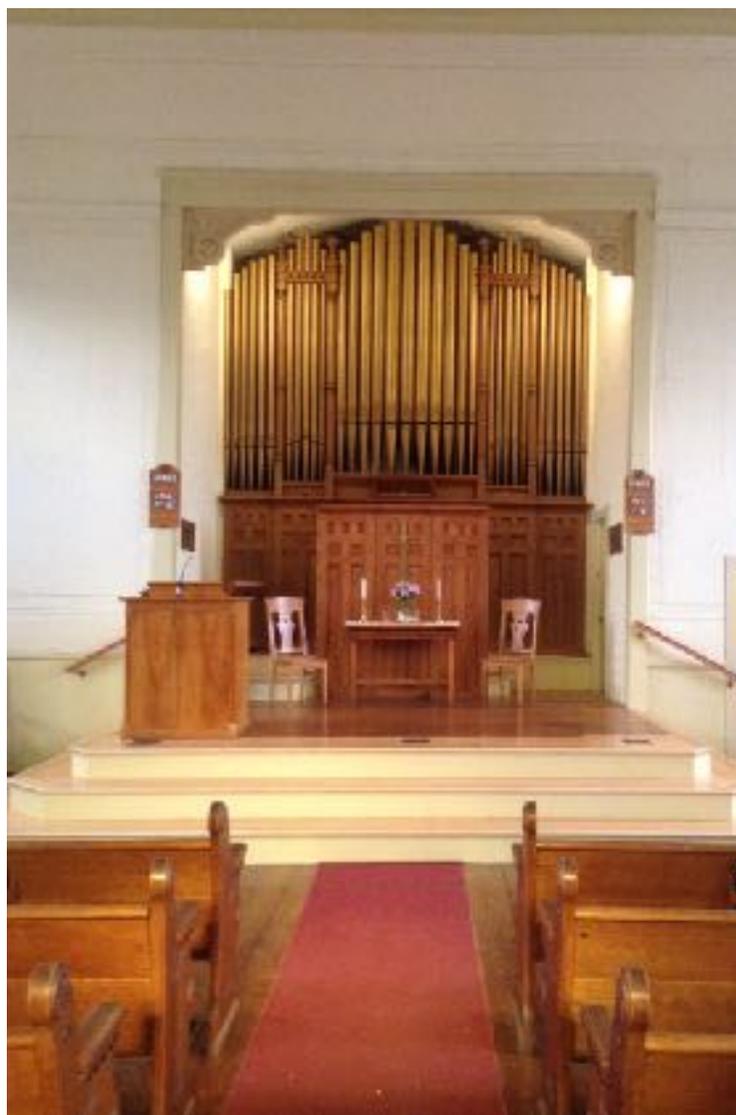
Nancy Satch Hoff

COUNCIL ON AGING NEWS

There will be a Christmas potluck lunch on Thursday, December 7th at noon at the Church, Ham, dessert and drinks will be provided. Please bring a dish to share.

RSVP with Charlotte Clement at 625-6270.

ALL ARE WELCOME !



Current look of the expanded chancel space with a majority of renovations complete! The organ is expected to remain in place through Easter. It will then be removed for restoration at the workshop of William Czelusniak, Northampton.

Photo by Margery Heins

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 Box 519
 Ashfield, MA 01330



DECEMBER 2017

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
					1	2 10-4 HOLIDAY BAZAAR
3 CHOIR 10 - WORSHIP communion HOLIDAY BAZAAR	4	5 3-6 Food Pantry Share the Warmth 7 - Deacons Mtg Trustees Mtg.	6	7	8	9 12-2 Citizens Climate Lobby
10 10 - WORSHIP Quarterly Mtg	11	12	13 7:15 - Choir Rehearsal	14 Missions/Social Ju 6 - Potluck 7 - Meeting	15	16 9 - STOLLEN MAKING
17 choir 10- WORSHIP 4 - Caroling 5 - Winter Grand Canyon	18	19 3-6 Food Pantry Share the Warmth 7- Bubble Up	20 7:15 - Choir Rehearsal	21	22	23
24 WORSHIP 7:30 EVE SERVICE 31 WORSHIP	25 MERRY CHRISTMAS	26	27 7:15 Choir Rehearsal	28	29	30

CHRISTMAS BLESSINGS