

Cross Currents



November 2016 • Open Hearts & Open Minds & Open Doors

From Pastor Andrea

My beloved siblings in our community of faith,

As you can imagine, SO MANY deep feelings course through my system now on a daily basis. Having announced my retirement from the Church (my last Sunday will be January 1, 2017), I now swing between hugely intense emotions not just on Sundays but each day of the week. I feel sorrow, loss, hope about the future, worry, love, caring...I carry dreams for the church, respect for your vision, devotion to you individually and collectively, and so much more.

I feel like I am walking around as one, big, pulsating bundle of strong feelings. And, as I have told YOU ALL so many times, there is no way out but through. I have to feel the loss and grieve, cry, and also embrace the hope and the new life that will begin soon for you all and for me. And somehow, with a both broken and hopeful heart, continue to lead meetings, preach on Sundays, laugh at Café Office Hours, and worry about our finances! I am very very much with you, and also backing nervously toward the door. As I preached on October 9th in the “Managers, Firefighters, and Exiles” sermon, I am one big hot mess.

But I do want to say this: the two strongest, most intense and abiding feelings I am having now—day in and day out—are **love and gratitude**. I am just loving you all up. I love your courage, I love what you say in Sermon Response Time, I love your humor, I love your quirks, I love how you stay for one full hour visiting together in Coffee Hour, I love how generous you are, I love how you love your kids and all our church kids, I love how you love God, I love how you love me, I love how you sing songs you have never sung before and give it your all, I just love you.

And I am also feeling unending and undiluted gratitude. This is hard to express because it is so huge. I feel so darn grateful (feel free to replace a stronger word in that previous sentence). I feel SO GRATEFUL. I feel grateful that you have

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gone with me on this journey of a lifetime for the past almost 12 years, grateful that you have been so tolerant of my flaws, grateful that you have been so forgiving of my (many) mistakes, grateful that you have loved good sermons and endured bad ones with aplomb, grateful that you care for each other and me with such tenderness, grateful that you know me well and still love me, grateful that you are a one-in-a-million congregation, grateful that you think I am funny even when I am just corny or silly in church. I am grateful that you love well and deeply, and forgive easily and often.

Right now, in between the panic about the future and the endless life review I seem to be engaged in, the strongest feelings I am having about YOU ALL are love and gratitude. And those feelings permeate everything.

Thank you for your enduring love. I am sorry that my very human side has messed up over the years and I am completely and thoroughly grateful for your patience and forgiveness. Thank you for everything you have taught me. You are fine teachers and I have grown tremendously under your tutelage.

Bless you, each one of you.

I love you and am so grateful to you.

Truly,

Pastor Andrea

The Nature of Suffering (in a few words)

A week ago Pastor Chris delivered a fine sermon on the nature of suffering, pointing out that often people in dire straits would ask him, "Pastor, there must be a reason for this, right?" Hoping he would say it was part of "God's plan." As Teresa of Avila once said, "If that's how you treat your friends, no wonder you have so many enemies!"

Many hands waved in the congregation, hoping to be able to share their thoughts during "Sermon Response" time. I sat next to my dear friend, who has many questions about suffering, and promised that we would talk more about it later. This is what I came up with in an email, now

transformed into a blog post: *A Few Words on Suffering*. After all, I'm an expert, right? After two cancer surgeries, followed by months of chemo, baldness, shaky legs, roiling stomach, and crappola brain?

I want to admit up front that finer minds than mine have crashed and foundered on this particular question: how can God allow such suffering and evil to exist in the world? If God is all-knowing, He would be aware of this; if God is all-loving, He would do something about it; and if God is all-powerful, He would fix it or prevent it. Such were the brilliant arguments of John Stuart Mill against the existence of God. (I realize that I can't conflate evil with suffering, but it is one of the central obstacles to people believing in God, so I am discussing them together.)

When my mom had lung cancer, she struggled with the mystery of suffering, not that she thought she *shouldn't* be ill, but that she needed a framework for the pain of the world. An assistant rector at St. John's in Northampton spoke with Marian about this, after she protested that God should be paying attention to the horror in Cambodia; "Marian, God doesn't want your pound of flesh! You can pray for healing." And he gave her a book called, *The Third Peacock on the Left*, which spoke to the reality of evil and suffering in our world.

My favorite analogy in the book is this: Suppose you are driving on a snowy, icy road, and your car suddenly skids off into a snow bank. You climb out and sit on the snow, wondering how you are going to get out of this situation. The author of the book then said, "God isn't going to come and start your car for you, but He will come and sit in the snow bank with you." I love this metaphor for how God accompanies us in our suffering, how He stays by us and

November Birthdays!

- 1 Ruth Jacobson-Hardy
- 2 Ross Bassett
- 5 Martha Sager-Cutt
- 6 Ella Agostino-Pierce
Elexy Edge-Wise
- 8 Ruth Beebe
Sean McElligott
- 9 Sayla Russell-Baker
- 10 Danielle Poudrier
- 11 Angelique Baker
- 12 Margie Serkin
- 13 Tara Castaldo Heart
- 15 Nancy Winninger
- 16 Rose Sullivan
- 17 Mary Lee Satterfield
- 18 Tildy Turchinetz
- 20 Joanne Morgan
- 21 Kate Kelly
- 22 Nancy Demarais
- 25 Jacquelin Cloonan
Lila Mereschuk
- 26 Ira Neff
Daniel Neff
- 29 Beth Agostino
- 30 cmoore



with us, though I would add that God does reserve the right—on occasion—to start your car for you. Or to send a Good Samaritan your way with some jumper cables in her car.

Some deal with the problem of evil and suffering by saying that God is NOT all-powerful, that there are limits on His power. But I believe that God is all-powerful and that Her power is love. This is the God who created people with free will (R. Rohr has said, “I would never have done that. It’s far too risky!”), because what is the value of automatic love? If our creator made us without free will, simply with our being attached to God by an umbilical cord of love, that would make us puppets. The love would not be given freely, and thus, would not be worth very much. I think that it is THIS love, freely given, which transforms us and makes us into children of God.

Is suffering ultimately a mystery? I think so. Why did I get cancer? Who knows. Why do friends of ours suffer from heart ailments, diabetes, mental illnesses, lame limbs, and a host of other horrors? Is there a reason for this? I don’t know, but I agree with one member in the congregation who said that we can put our own *purpose* on suffering, can give it meaning.

Here’s a small sketch of how I’ve dealt, and continue to deal, with my cancer and the suffering it has brought:

Crap. I’m sick. Seriously sick. Will it come back again, this time in my brain, God forbid? Could I live long enough to see one grandchild, just one? I wish I felt better. Maybe you could please take away this fatigue and cruddy brain, please, and don’t forget the weird feet? (I prefer beggy prayers to intelligent petitions.)

But then, this is what I came to see and believe through this long, hard year: I am completely and utterly in God’s hands. I am cradled in love; my being is part of God’s life; whatever happens next—whether it suits *my* plans and desires—will ultimately be good, because I am contained in this beneficence, wrapped in swaddling bands of love.

This is a short take on the nature of individual suffering. Of course, when we look at the Holocaust, Stalin’s Gulags, Cambodia, and so many other places of evil, it requires more of an effort to get a handle on it. I continue to believe that God is present in whatever happens to us, and whatever happens to the world at large. That doesn’t mean there won’t be tears—plenty of them—but it does mean that it is not for naught, and that in the end we will be redeemed and transformed.

- Annie Turner

Dear Church Family and Friends,

Every week our pastors present an invitation to the offering, reminding us throughout the year that our financial contributions are necessary to sustain our church community. As the Stewardship Committee, we appreciate these messages. Talking about money is hard, asking for money is hard, and being asked for money is often harder still. Yet, if we avoid these conversations, our community cannot thrive because we will lack the resources to keep our vision vital.

We have asked members of our community to share their stories about what makes our community vibrant for them. Through these stories, we hope to highlight the common vision that unites our community. As we move into the coming year it is more important than ever that we invest in our vision for this community of ours - our spirit-filled, justice-seeking, peace-loving, LGBTQ-affirming, anti-racist, child-centered, song-filled, ever thankful, stubbornly hopeful, beloved community we make together. Together we are the church and our community will continue to grow and flourish because each of us invests in our vision.

Our goal this year, set in partnership with the Trustees, is \$150,000. We believe this goal is ambitious, but also achievable. Reaching this goal will allow us to continue God’s work through us. As you consider your pledge this year, please take time to hold close your own stories about our cherished church community; then pray for guidance; and then, please, invest in our vision.

In Loving Gratitude,

Stewardship Committee

Looking Way Ahead!

Hot Chocolate Run! Because so many church members are involved in the Annual Hot Chocolate Run that raises money for Safe Passage—so many of you run and volunteer!—our Church will be throwing all our support behind the Run this year and not meeting for worship at 10:00 on December 4th. Instead we will have a lovely Evensong-style worship at 4:00 pm that day, with music, readings, lighting the Advent Wreath, and Communion. So you can be part of the Hot Chocolate Run this year without worrying about the conflict with our morning worship service!

My Journey Expanded, But Abridged

Most of you know about the part of my journey from male to female when I started coming to HCC in January, but, of course, there's a lot more to the story. Some of you know it and some of you don't, I just thought I'd try to fill everyone in.

When I was 5 or 6, I used to love watching "That Girl" with Marlo Thomas. I loved the show, loved Marlo Thomas, and wanted to be her. Even at that age, I had been socialized as a male long enough to know that boys were not supposed to want to be Marlo Thomas. I decided that I would keep it to myself and not tell anyone about it, which I did until December 2006.

I finally decided, after fighting and hiding my transgender feelings for years, that I would finally tell someone—my wife. Needless to say, she was shocked, and immediately thought that I had literally gone insane. She could not see that there was any possibility I knew what I was talking about. That moment kicked off what I call "The Bad Years," a horrible time for me that lasted until January of 2016.

Shortly after telling my wife, I made a very-nearly successful suicide attempt, and this started a chain reaction that I wasn't able to stop until January. I was promptly hospitalized and treated for severe depression with meds, talk therapy, and, ultimately, with shock therapy. Later my psychiatrist diagnosed me with bipolar disorder, an incorrect diagnosis I would later discover. My doctor also did not believe I was transgender. I was put on some very heavy duty medications, which kept me from being me. Because I couldn't concentrate well on the meds, I lost a well-paying engineering job that I had been at for nine years. The next year, I lost another well-paying engineering job. I was an unhappy house-husband and did a lot of cooking, cleaning, shopping and I watched a heck of a lot of TV.

I was clearly not in good shape when my wife asked for a trial separation in January 2013; I finally moved back to Massachusetts from Maine in March. In time, I found new mental health care providers that found, yes, I was depressed, but not bipolar. The new providers also agreed with my assertion that I was transgender.

In January 2016, life seemed pretty dire to me and I came up with a second suicide plan. I told my therapist about it, and obviously concerned, they sent me to crisis support, and they arranged for hospitalization for me. I was placed on the LGBTQ floor at the Brattleboro Retreat, and I quickly lost any desire to hurt myself. During one of my

meetings with my assigned psychiatrist, I told him that I really wanted to transition. He agreed, and that portion of my journey, the part of my journey that you all know, started.

My transition has been the most wonderful and magical experience for me. I am no longer depressed and I do not feel any need to hurt myself and do not view it as an option—ever. I have finally gotten to be me, and have found that I love myself and who I am.

Thank you all for your love and support as I continue on my journey. You've been great co-pilots.

Love and peace,
Mariel Addis

Report From the Congregational Meeting

Participants at the Congregational Meeting held last Sunday voted (64 to 25) to offer our Associate Pastor Chris Mereschuk the opportunity to serve as the Acting Pastor following the retirement of Pastor Andrea on January 2, 2017. This plan means that Chris will serve as Acting Pastor while the Church prepares its profile to present to potential candidates for the settled pastor position. The search process could take one year.

A search committee, made up of people nominated by the congregation, will be selected in 2017 to review candidates. Keeping with UCC recommendations, if Pastor Chris decides to apply to be the Settled Pastor, his application will be considered first before other candidates are reviewed.

Upon receiving the news of this vote, Pastor Chris expressed great excitement, and is honored and humbled to be entrusted with this position. In the coming days, the Transitional Leadership Team will work with Pastor Chris to finalize the details of this offer.

Thank you, everyone, for your feedback, ideas, and support as we head together into this time of transition.

- *The Transitional Leadership Team*

Office hours for Ferdene Chin-Yee, our Church Bookkeeper/Office Administrator, are Monday and Wednesday from 9:30 am - 3:30 pm.

The New Commandments

In Children's Church last month, the second through sixth graders learned about the Ten Commandments. As Andrew Geery led them on an exploration of the commandments, they were encouraged to think of additional commandments that made sense to them. Here are a few of their suggestions:

- Be yourself
- No one goes home lonely
- No child goes hungry
- Be nice to pets
- No littering
- Be nice to people ... even if they are mean to you

What great ideas!

- Dana Gillette

Black Lives Matter Series

Wondering why people are saying Black Lives Matter rather than All Lives Matter? Join us for these events to learn about the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, what in U.S. history has led to the creation of this movement, what is happening currently in relation to racism on a systemic and on a personal level, how our local police are understanding and responding to African-Americans and the BLM movement, and how white individuals experience white privilege. In thinking about all of this, the Peace and Justice Committee is creating a series of programs that can address these issues. We want to help all of us learn more about what our African-American neighbors and friends experience so that we can be better able to support them and be effective allies -- and to understand how addressing racism in all its forms will benefit all of us. In addition to the Coming Out White and Privileged program which is running now, we have three programs planned for the rest of 2016, with other ideas that we are developing for the new year. We will also be adding resources on BLM to the library at church.

The Coming Out White and Privileged group has a page on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/186588055111884/>).

Saturday, November 12, 7:00 - 8:30 -- Performance Piece -- THIS IS REAL: Talk about race and privilege. Expect the

unexpected in this performance piece during which people of color and white people tell the truth. The difficult truth, the not-pretty truth, the this-may-make-you-uncomfortable truth, the honest truth. Expect to be uncomfortable, grateful, moved, inspired, and thrust into new territory with regard to dismantling racism. Filled with hope, humor and hard-hitting reality, this piece will leave you with questions and new insights -- which is why there is a talk-back after the performance so you can wrestle with the issues and articulate strategies for moving forward. Child care will be available.

Cast: Heidi Nortonsmith, Louis Mitchell, Marcia Gomes, Jennifer Ladd, Gina Nortonsmith, Jo Comerford, Tobias Davis, Andrea Ayvazian.

Tuesday, December 6, 5:30 - 7:30 -- Conversation with Jody Kasper, Police Chief, Northampton -- This will be a Soup, Salad and Social Change event with a presentation by Jody Kasper and an opportunity to ask questions. Child care will be available.

In 2017 -- A presentation on how the Black Lives Matter movement fits into the history of African-American freedom and liberation movements...

A workshop on the commonalities of oppressive systems and structures, the "isms" of our time....

A sermon by a black pastor....

Showing of the film, *13th*, a recent release that focuses on the prison industry, how it developed, and how it is penalizing young African-American men....

Identifying the actions we can take to support the Black Lives Matter movement....

Please join us at one or more of these special events

-- Karen Browne-Courage, Lisa Hall, Doug Renick and Andrea Ayvazian

Looking Way Way Ahead!

Christmas Day! Our big Christmas Eve worship service will be held, just as it always is, on December 24th at 7:00 pm. However, because Christmas falls on a Sunday this year, we will be holding our worship service on December 25th in the Dining Room and there will be light breakfast foods available when you arrive. We will be reading a Christmas story and singing carols and children are welcome to come in pajamas! Our service will be a little unusual, festive, and delicious! Come one, come all!

HCC Circle of Care for Refugees

As you may already know, the City of Northampton is working to create a network of support for Catholic Charities to bring 51 refugees (10 to 17 families) to Northampton. The mayor has called together community leaders to work on issues of housing, employment, education, English classes, fundraising, etc. Susannah Crolius is the Catholic Charities coordinator, and is also organizing Circles of Care. Each circle will be a group of 6-8 people who will be assigned to a refugee family to provide more personal support, such as assistance with household preparation pre-arrival (supplies, furniture, clothing, etc.), pick up at the airport, orientation to Northampton and to American culture, transportation to doctor's appointments, English language practice, etc.

Andrea is on the mayor's committee and was asked if our church would organize a Circle of Care. When she brought this request to the Peace & Justice Committee, we agreed, and a circle was formed with Lisa Hall as Leader. The members of our circle are: Doug Renick and Carol Rinehart (as a team), Linda Ziegenbein and Andrew Geery (as a team), both Jim and Christine Foudy, Carolyn DuBois and Paula Spencer. Our church is being asked to commit to having a circle for 5 years, with circle members serving for six months to a year. So if you are interested, there will be opportunities for you to step in.

Refugee families are assigned to our area by the federal government and are likely to come from the Middle East, especially Afghanistan and Syria, or from Burundi or the Congo in Africa. There will be trainings coming up for circle members to help us know what our role is and isn't, and how to be culturally appropriate. The first families are expected to arrive starting in January 2017.

Please watch for more information in the coming months. We're sure there will be many ways for our church community to support these refugees in making their home here.

- Lisa Hall

New Tablecloths in the Dining Room!

Out with the old, in with the new! Thank you to the quiet, hard-working, and diligent crew who, behind the scenes, researched these special "oilcloths" and ordered them for our church. Bright! New! Beautiful! Blue! Cherries! Thank you Tablecloth Angels.



Our "VOTE" Poster Winner!

The *Daily Hampshire Gazette* ran a contest asking for artists, both children and adults, to design a "VOTE!" poster. The purpose of the contest was to encourage voting on election day. When I saw this contest announced, I thought it would be a fun and quick art project to do with my son Miles. The prize was a \$50 downtown

Northampton gift card, so why not enter?

We talked about splitting the prize should either of us win. I decided to enter the letter "E", as it is my middle initial. Miles entry, the letter "T" was Uncle Sam saying "I want you to Vote!" Apparently "E" is my lucky middle initial, as I won! Miles sadly did not win, but he was very happy with his consolation prize, as per our agreement!

- Maureen Ricksgers

Dear CrossCurrent Reader,

I want to thank many of you who have contributed to *CrossCurrents* since 2012 when first I took over and redesigned our Church newsletter. Thanks especially to Pastor Andrea for her many lead articles and also Peter Ives and Annie Turner for their thoughtful additions. Thanks also to Karin McGowan and Paula Spencer who gave their time at short notice to proofread each issue saving me untold embarrassment.

As you may imagine, producing a newsletter each month takes considerable time, and meeting each self-imposed deadline has often meant time spent on the computer rather than with my family or in pursuit of other interests. Consequently I've decided to pass on the baton after our upcoming December issue goes to press. Like each of you I will look forward to the January 2017 issue of *Crosscurrents* (should Pastor Chris and his team of advisors choose to continue producing it) on Dec. 31. 2017 promises to be an exciting time -- a new president, a new minister at HCC and a newsletter designed, produced and proofread by a new *CrossCurrents* team.

- Richard Spencer

Calendar for November

Please check the online church calendar to confirm meeting dates, times and locations.

Thank you "What Chai is This" for providing the coffee hour goodies during November.

Date	Time	Event	Location
Wed. Nov. 2	7:00 pm	Choir Practice	Sanctuary
Thurs. Nov. 3	9:30 am	Café Office Hours	Williamsburg Snack Bar
	6:30 pm	Diaconate Meeting	Dining Room
Sun. Nov. 6	10:00 am	Worship Service with Communion	Sanctuary
	11:30 am	Visioning Committee, <i>see page 9</i>	Sanctuary
Mon. Nov. 7	6:00 pm	Coming Out White	Dining Room
Tues. Nov. 8		Election Day Remember to vote!	
	7:00 pm	Men's Fellowship Meeting	Dining Room
Wed. Nov. 9	7:00 pm	Choir Practice	Sanctuary
Thurs. Nov. 10	9:30 am	Café Office Hours	Williamsburg Snack Bar
	6:00 pm	Trustee Meeting	Dining Room
Sat. Nov. 12	7:00 pm	Black Lives Matter, <i>see page 5</i>	Dining Room
Sun. Nov. 13	10:00 am	Worship Service	Sanctuary
	12:00 pm	Council Meeting	Sanctuary
Mon. Nov. 14	7:00 pm	Coming Out White	Dining Room
Tues. Nov. 15	6:00 pm	Trans Writing Group	Dining Room
Wed. Nov. 16	6:00 pm	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Book Discussion, <i>see page 10</i>	Dining Room
	7:00 pm	Choir Practice	Sanctuary
Thurs. Nov. 17	9:30 am	Café Office Hours	Williamsburg Snack Bar
	6:00 pm	Journey Support Group	Sanctuary
Sun. Nov. 20	10:00 am	Worship Service	Sanctuary
Mon. Nov. 21	6:00 pm	Peace and Justice Meeting	Dining Room
Wed. Nov. 23	7:00 pm	Choir Practice	Sanctuary
Thurs. Nov. 24	4:00 pm	Thanksgiving , Dinner at the Church, <i>see page 10</i>	Dining Room
Fri. Nov. 25	9:00 am	Grass Hill Food Prep	Kitchen/Dining Room

Date	Time	Event	Location
Fri. Nov. 25	3:00 pm	Grass Hill Setup	Dining Room
Sat. Nov. 26	9:00 - 3:00 pm	Grass Hill Gallery, <i>see page 10 for details</i>	Dining Room
Sun. Nov. 27	10:00 am	Worship Service	Sanctuary
Wed. Nov. 30	6:00 pm	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Book Discussion, <i>see page 10</i>	Dining Room
	7:00 pm	Choir Practice	Sanctuary

Spirit of Service

The congregation makes the church. This is one of the most important lessons I learned growing up in The First Church of Windsor, the oldest Congregational Church in Connecticut.

The congregation makes important decisions – they are not handed down from above. Members of the congregation serve as deacons, make coffee, teach our children. Members (and friends) take turns serving to ensure that the work of *our* church is done.

I started attending Haydenville Congregational Church with my young children more than a decade ago. It didn't take long for me to start volunteering, although it took many years before I officially joined. My service work at Haydenville over the years has been hands-on. Helping in children's church. Organizing an intergenerational games night. Bringing in food for coffee hour. Encouraging coffee orders to support the youth group and children's church. I was comfortable volunteering. Doing helpful things. Important things, but not always "spiritual" things.

This summer I volunteered for something new: ushering. While ushering is a relatively quick and easy way to volunteer, it was a stretch for me. Truth be told, Haydenville's tradition of "handholding ushers" made me uncomfortable. I could not envision myself walking up the aisle holding the hand of someone I may not know well – and did not select for an intimate connection. But when Julie Salzman kindly asked me if I would usher, the volunteer in me quickly replied, "yes."

When it comes to service, ushering is pretty simple. No lesson plans to remember. No special trips to the grocery

store. Simply attend church (ideally for a whole month), gather at the back when we sing the children up to Children's Church, walk to the front of the church at the pastor's signal. Pick up an offering plate, walk around the church collecting the offering, walk back up the aisle. Done. Or so I thought.

What happened the first Sunday in September surprised me. My turn to usher had rolled around. We gathered in the back of the church as planned, determining our order and our aisles. Al Neal and I held hands and it was easy, comforting. As we walked, I felt a sense of connection that took me back decades, took me back to a teenaged me ushering as a youth deacon. I felt the sweet spirit and grace of my grandmother, who was a faithful church member and weekly presence at church. I felt a connection to the community that nourished me as a child. And I felt a connection to the here and now in Haydenville. Walking up the aisle I was met with a sense of the holy. In that short, transcendent moment I felt my place in the web of Christian life.

The spiritual gifts of ushering came as a sweet surprise. As I walked around church that morning, I felt a deeper connection with each of you.

This is *our* church. This is your church. Take a chance and try a new way to get involved. You never know what you might find.

- Dana Gillette

"The future belongs to those people who believe in the beauty of their dreams."

- Eleanor Roosevelt

Enduring Understandings

Your Peace & Justice Committee read twelve principles of sustainability in a recent *Gazette* article. It announced that the Hitchcock Center has adopted these principles, which were developed by New York City-based Cloud Institute for Sustainability Education as “Enduring Understandings.” We thought our congregation would like to consider them one by one each month. Below is the second of twelve - to ponder all month and imagine what our world would be like if this were what we all believed, if this were how we thought and acted:

2. We are all in this together. We are interdependent on each other and on the natural systems. In this context, self interests are best served through mutually beneficial relationships.



Visioning Themes Next Steps

Sunday, November 6th after Worship • Over the past couple of years, our congregation has been engaging in visioning and planning for our future. Themes have emerged from all of the workshops and listening sessions. Your voice is essential at this gathering where we will clarify and prioritize these themes for our future. Childcare will be provided. Please save the date and look for more details coming soon.

From the Deacons' Bench

Discernment: A thoughtful, prayerful process to listen for what God wants for us.

I've been thinking about discernment lately. As I write this, our church has not yet decided on transitional leadership. By the time you read this, we will have engaged in discussion, argument, prayer, reflection, voting, and, I hope, listening. Lots of listening.

As we approach this decision I've heard anxiety and fear. “What if...” starts many of those conversations. I've heard threats: I'll leave if the church doesn't do what I want it to do. I've heard urgency about what will happen if we don't get this right. Each sentiment resonates with a concern that I too have felt.

I came to the October Deacon's meeting wishing for certainty. Certainty is comfortable, easy, and, well, convenient. So I hoped that Deacons would come to a clear consensus about what we should do. I didn't get what I wanted.

We were all over the map, reflecting, I believe, the larger church community. Still, our discussion was courageous and creative, thoughtful and loving, respectful and compassionate. There were heartfelt reminders of who we were, who we are, and who we are becoming as a community of faith committed to inclusion, justice and peace. There were long serious moments, and moments of raucous laughter. And there was a critical reminder from one of our Deacons: We are the Church.

Listening to this passionate, funny, mindful group, I discerned this: certainty might be overrated. What God wants for our community of faith is to support each other through challenging times, and attend to each other's fear and anxiety with compassion and gentleness. God doesn't care if we are certain. God wants us to show up for each other, to build a haven for each other as we weather uncertain times.

God wants us to hear the urgent whisper of Their love each time we remember that, no matter what, we are the church, God is at the center, and all will be well. Of that I am certain.

- Pat James

Please Join Us In a Celebration of Thanksgiving! November 24, 2016 at 4:00 pm

Do you have a treasured family recipe? Are you alone for the holiday, or have guests coming from out of town and feel overwhelmed? Is your Thanksgiving a let-down without Aunt Sally's sweet potatoes? Are you in need, after the angst filled fall, of a warm community Thanksgiving celebration with all the fixings? Do you want to go out for Thanksgiving and not have to do it all yourself, but still want that "family" feeling? Does everyone get the dessert they want at your house, but you? Signups start on October 23rd after church. See Julie during coffee hour or call 413-268-0137. When you sign up you will be asked what you would like to bring. As time goes on we will need people to bring the other items needed for the dinner, so if you are not a cook, don't worry. We will also need several groups of people to help pull this off, so if you like to cook, would help with clean up, can come early to set tables, etc., we need you!

Generous Gift to Fund Thanksgiving Dinner at the Church!

It is with tremendous gratitude that we say THANKYOU to Cate and Carol Shaw for a generous contribution coming from their family to our Church to fund our Thanksgiving Dinner at the Church this year. This gift is being given to lift up and honor Cate Kelly's mother, who died earlier this year. Cate's mom was British and an excellent cook—guided in her culinary skills by her English mother and her Italian mother-in-law! Cate's mother's favorite American holiday was Thanksgiving. Cate says, "For Mom, Thanksgiving epitomized her belief that no matter how difficult or how hard life was there was always something to be grateful for." And we are so grateful for this generous donation and thank the Shaw Family for honoring Cate's mother by supporting our Church Thanksgiving Dinner—how touching, how fitting, and how lovely.

Grasshill Christmas Gallery

*23rd Annual Craft Fair
Saturday, Nov 26th 9-3:00 pm
Haydenville Congregational Church*

On "Shop Small Saturday," one of the best things you can do is come to our beautiful, light-filled Church dining room for a relaxing and wonderful experience. Twenty local crafters/artisans—including several from our Church family—offer their one-of-a-kind treasures for your holiday shopping. Included are paintings, photography, quilts, jewelry, gourds, embroidered tiny stuffed toys, soaps, pottery, hand carved wooden utensils, seasonal decorations, knitted items, cards, and whatever my eight-year-old grandson Rowan comes up with (last year, it was enchanted islands, Buddha trees, Zombie Claus cards and feather ornaments from his own chickens).

And I should mention the food! My sister Shirley channels our Grandma Warner and pulls off the most fabulous luncheon for sale. Famous corn chowder, plus another homemade soup, sandwiches on homemade bread, cookies, sweet buns, brownies, and her spectacular cream puffs! Also, she'll be selling packages of assorted homemade cookies, loaves of bread, and whatever else she thinks up.

All in all, this is just the way you want to spend the Saturday after Thanksgiving. No hassles, free parking, no admission fee, handicap accessible.

Questions? call Trish @ 268-7254 or 413 727-5150 or see her in Church.

Two Evenings at the Church to Discuss this New York Times Bestseller

JUST MERCY: A Story of Justice and Redemption by Bryan Stevenson is such a remarkable, stirring, important, inspiring, motivating, powerful, painful, and extraordinary book that I think we need to gather together and talk about it. Pastor Andrea will be leading two evenings at the church to discuss this *New York Times* bestseller. So grab a copy if you can. Once you start reading, you will not be able to put this book down. All welcome. Wednesday, November 16 and Wednesday, November 30, 5:30 to 7:00 PM. Join the circle!

This Month In Children's, Youth & Family Ministries

Coming Up in Children's, Youth, and Family Ministries

November 6th: Lessons on All Saints Day; Communion served by Rev. Matilda Cantwell

November 13th: Parable of the Sower (Group 1); Zacchaeus (Group 2)

November 20th: Advent-Themed Lessons

November 27th: "Swords Into Plowshares" (Group 1+2)

December 4th: No Children's Church (No morning worship; 4:00 pm worship)

December 11th: Instant Christmas Pageant (All ages in worship)

December 18th: Advent Candle Art Project

December 25th: Christmas Day, No Children's Church

January 1st: New Year's Day, No Children's Church

"Today I Learned" Sheets • Ever wonder what your child did in Children's Church beyond "had snack" and "I don't know"? Wonder no more! Each Sunday at the close of our lesson we hand out a "Today I Learned (TIL)" sheet that gives a brief summary of the day's lesson, along with some suggested questions and topics for further discussion. You can grab one when you pick up your child or ask a teacher or Pastor Chris for a copy.

Instant Christmas Pageant • Sunday, December 11th at 10:00 am • All people of all ages are invited to take on a role in our Christmas Pageant - - just by attending worship! **Come dressed up as a shepherd, wise person, animal, angel, or a member of the Holy Family.** Some extra costumes will be available. We will use the brilliant script written by Rev. Julie Olmsted, with our costumed actors and the whole congregation jumping into action throughout the pageant. Everyone can play a part in this rollicking retelling of the nativity story. Contact Pastor Chris if you'd like to help organize the Pageant.

Children and Youth in Worship Leadership • One of the great ideas that came out of our Family Meeting was a desire to have our children and youth be more actively and frequently involved in our Sunday worship in the Sanctuary. Pastor Chris is looking for ways to make this happen, and is currently accepting all ideas and suggestions from liturgical dance to prayers and poems to being a greeter or sharing the Welcome. Please contact Pastor Chris if you (if you're a child or youth) or a child or youth in your household is interested. Please note that this idea is in the brainstorming phase!

Rev. Chris Mereschuk, *Associate Pastor and Director of Children's, Youth, and Family Ministries*
Andrew Geery, *Chair of the Children's and Family Ministries Committee*

Elbow Room Coffee Fundraiser

November 6th & 13th • Support Children's, Youth, and Family Ministries and a great local business while you drink your coffee! You can order your coffee in 12oz foil bags for \$12. We'll be taking orders on **November 6th and 13th** during Coffee Hour, with orders arriving by November 27th. Payment (check or cash) at the time of ordering is greatly appreciated. Thank you for your support!

SAVE THE DATE

Sunday, November 6th, 3:00 pm

Mak'hela: The Jewish Chorus of Western Mass.

Performing to celebrate

Thirty years of the **Manna Soup Kitchen**

Ice cream after the concert
donated by Herrell's Ice Cream

No reservations or tickets.

A free-will donation will be requested to benefit

Manna Soup Kitchen

Congregation B'Nai Israel • 253 Prospect St., Northampton

Church Leadership

Rev. Dr. Andrea Ayvazian
Senior Pastor

Rev. Chris Mereschuk
Associate Pastor;
Director of Children's,
Youth, and Family
Ministries

Jeff Olmsted
Minister of Music

Lynn Fogg
Church Moderator

Sam Icklan
Church Vice Moderator

Lisa Hall
Clerk

Jo Cannon
Treasurer

Pat James
Diaconate, *Chair*

Alice Barber
Trustees, *Chair*

Rev. Dr. Peter Ives
Theologian-
in-Residence

Yohah Ralph
Minister of Outreach,
Advocacy and
Pastoral Care

Kathy O'Connor
Church Sexton

**Bookkeeper/
Administrative
Assistant**
Ferdene Chin-Yee

Jim Foudy
Human Resources
*Coordinator, Men's
Fellowship, Chair &
Church
Communications*

Andrew Geery
Children's and
Family Ministries
Committee, *Chair*

Jennifer Clarson
Angel Take-out,
Coordinator

Nancy Wwinner
Angel Wings,
Coordinator

Jackie Cloonan
Snow Angels, Green
Angels, *Coordinator*

Bev Orluske
Nancy Wwinner
Angel Hearts

Doug Renick
Peace and Justice
Steering Committee,
Chair

Bob Varnon
Stewardship
Committee, *Chair*

Carolyn DuBois
Music Committee,
Chair

Sue Carbin
Building
Maintenance, *Chair*
& Church Scheduler
scarbin1973@aol.com

Linda Zeigenbein
Interfaith Cot Shelter
Meal, *Coordinator*

Anne Pratt
Scripture Reader,
Coordinator

Laura Paul
Librarian

Shirley Sicurello
Welcome Ministry,
Chair

Sharon Grace
Julie Salzman
Head Ushers

Jennifer Miller-Antill
Laurie Priest
Head Greeters

Laura Garcia
Webmaster

Richard Spencer
CrossCurrents

Bev Orluske
Nancy Wwinner
Keepers of the Keys

Ross Bassett
Jan Varnon
Bob Varnon
Lay Delegates

Rev. Dr. Peter Ives
Pat James
Keepers
of the Covenant

Trustees (by Seniority)
Alice Barber
Karin McGowan
Laura Garcia
Jo Cannon, *Treasurer.*
Sylvia Fappiano, *LA
Rep.* Carol Shaw

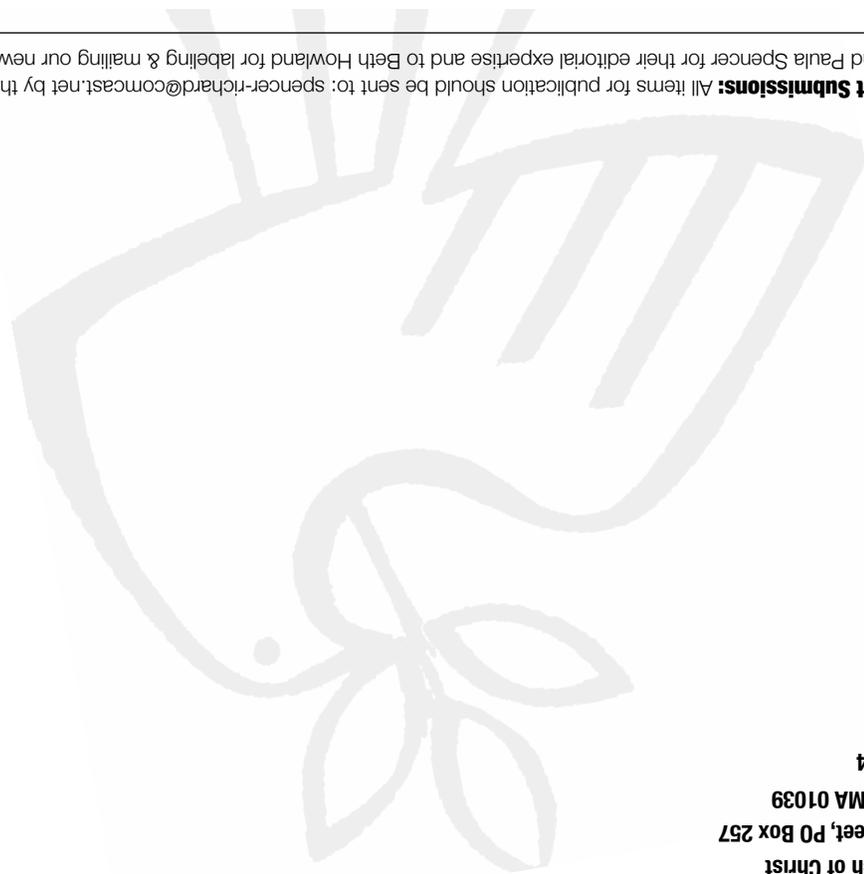
Deacons *(by Seniority)*

Amy Andrew
Pat James
Paula Spencer
Shirley Sicurello
Carolyn DuBois
Olivia Ilano Davis
Tobias Davis
Karen Browne-
Courage
Trish LaFreniere
Cate Shaw
Mariel Addis

Church Council

Senior Pastor
Moderator
Vice Moderator
Clerk
Treasurer
Trustees, *Chair*
Diaconate, *Chair*
Stewardship, *Chair*
Music, *Chair*
Peace & Justice, *Chair*
Family Ministries,
Chair

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