

Cross Currents



December 2016 • Open Hearts & Open Minds & Open Doors

From Pastor Andrea

Recently, a member of our church family asked me if I was ready to retire. To be more specific, she actually said, “Are you ready to leave us?”

I was surprised by the question and felt that I could instantly cry. But I steadied myself because I thought crying at that moment was not a good idea.

I paused, and in those few seconds of quiet, I decided to tell her the truth without making it tidy and without being evasive.

No, I said. I am not ready to go. But I added quickly, and I am not sure I ever would be or could be ready to go.

I think that is the truth of it. I am not really ready to leave you, but I will never be ready to leave you. And yet, in some ways that seem to exist in a realm beyond words, it is time to go.

I have served you with my whole heart and loved you dearly and deeply. And told you so. Many times. And that will be a part of me forever. I leave knowing that I have given you every gift, skill, talent, strength and piece of wisdom that I carry inside me. It feels like my entire life was in preparation to helping rebuild the Haydenville Congregational Church.

And in return for serving you with my whole heart and loving you deeply, you trusted me, and gave me your hearts and loved me deeply. I gave much, and received much much more.

Highlights

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“Then, something settled inside, probably that grace-filled, forgiving Holy Spirit who comes to visit me when I am in unstable mode. It said, “Go forth and do something. Do not sit in despair. Be proactive, babe.”

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The Christmas Story

“We are told that the baby named Jesus grew to be a man who ushered in a revolution of love and compassion, nonviolence and mercy, healing and hope
O God, renew our faith, restore our dreams, strengthen our belief, and make us brave for we long to continue the work that Jesus began”

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Friends and colleagues have given me articles and other readings on retirement and I find most of them unhelpful. They talk about having a new relationship with time, and living out one's heart's desires. The readings are unhelpful because I have lived out my heart's desire—within our community, with all of you. So I have put most of what I have been given aside and just muscle on through the stages of loss. And I hug and pray with those of you who come to my office in tears.

But one reading that is not about retirement has been helpful and I have returned to it over and over again. It is from John O'Donohue's book *To Bless the Space Between Us*. The blessing is called "Courage" and I share with you a few of the lines,

Close your eyes.

Gather all the kindling

About your heart

To create one spark.

That is all you need

To nourish the flame

That will cleanse the dark

Of its weight of festered fear.

A new confidence will come alive

To urge you toward higher ground

Where your imagination

Will learn to engage difficulty

As its most rewarding threshold!

I like this blessing because it works for me and also for all of you and what lies ahead.

You too stand at a "most rewarding threshold."

It was easy, when I first came to Haydenville, to help the church move from a "family church" to a "pastoral church." But try as I might, I could not quite tug or drag us fully into being a "program church."

Although we have all the trappings of a "program church" (according to the experts who write about these things), it was hard for me to get us there because I was (and I supposed you were too) sort of stuck in the "pastoral church" model. I was used to being at all meetings, available 24/7, and at the hub of a spinning wheel. I talked about how much we need to move fully and completely into being a program church, but never really quite got us there.

A "most rewarding threshold" awaits you now. Under Pastor Chris' fine leadership, I think the church will truly move into being a well-oiled program church that hums along with grace.

So I am holding onto the John O'Donohue blessing and I hope you will also. "A new confidence will come alive/To urge you toward higher ground." I believe that is true.

I am reading John O'Donohue these days, and singing my favorite hymns to myself. Especially this verse from, "How Firm a Foundation,"

When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,

My grace, all-sufficient, shall be thy supply.

The flames shall not hurt thee; I only design

Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine.

I have never ever ever been good at saying good-bye. So I will close this piece with a word of gentle farewell.... remember always that God is near and your source of strength, guidance, hope and vision. Remember that what we have experienced together at the church can never be taken from us. Remember that I have served and loved you with my whole heart and you have given me and taught me more than I could have ever imagined when I first came to the Haydenville Church. Remember that a "most rewarding threshold" lies ahead! Move forward with confidence and all shall be well.

With love,



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.

Season of Change, Season of Hope

"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven" ~ Ecclesiastes 3:1

"We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor for the soul..." ~ Hebrews 6:19

"For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope." ~ Jeremiah 29:11

My Dear Sisters, Brothers, and Siblings,

I am excited and humbled by your recent decision to call me as your Acting Pastor during our upcoming time of clergy leadership transition. You have my full commitment to leading, shepherding, and being with you through this period, and my promise to be a faithful steward of your trust and support.

You have, however, not only called me to undertake this journey, but have called yourselves as well! It is my firm belief that it is only by the strength and prayerful and broad leadership of our radically inclusive and stubbornly hopeful Beloved Community that we will not only survive this transition, but *thrive* and emerge even more dedicated to our mission, vision, and ministry in the world. This new era for Haydenville Congregational Church is going to provide a wide and diverse array of opportunities for creativity, innovation, and leadership. And you (Yes, YOU!) have a critical role to play.

Some folks have asked me and the Transition Leadership Team about what will change and what will stay the same. Some ask this with the anxiety that comes with the unknown, and some bursting with ideas. I will say this: Each one of us came to Haydenville and remained at Haydenville because we found a community that embraced and inspired us, called us in and called us to task, affirmed us and loved us for who we are. To the fullest extent that I am able, I promise you that I will make certain that none of those things change. I will also promise you that some other things will change! That is the nature of transition, and, indeed, is the nature of life.



While serving a congregation in New Orleans, I was introduced to the concept of "Sankofa" - - a Ghanan word translated as "Go back and get it." Sankofa is often symbolized by a bird whose feet face forward, but whose head is turned backwards toward an egg resting on its back. One interpretation of this symbol urges us to move forward, yet

to bring the best of our traditions and history along with us as we birth a new thing (hence the egg). I've shared this message before, and I will certainly lift it up again as we journey together through this time of transition.

And while we bring the best of the past forward, we also chart a new way, together. Guided by our core commitments - - those things that make us "uniquely Haydenville" - - I am most excited about and inspired by what we can become while continuing to be what we are already. As for this pre-transition time, I am grateful for my strong relationship with Pastor Andrea, having learned and grown from her mentorship and modeling in so many ways over the past 3 years while serving as your Associate Pastor. Pastor Andrea and I have begun the process of sharing essential information while honoring her continuing role as our Senior Pastor. We are working with the Transition Leadership Team to discern what logistics we need to consider and what we need to have in place so that our transition can be smooth and ready to go as of January 2, 2017. Over the next few weeks and months, details about the transition and opportunities for your involvement will emerge, and I urge you to keep updated on all that will be going on.

Through all of this, I will be relying on you. I will need you to come to me with your ideas and suggestions and your willingness to help. I will need you to seek me out directly if you are unhappy with something or feel overlooked. I will need your grace, understanding, and forgiveness in recognizing that I am only one person now taking on the role of two people. I will need you to show up. I will need you to pray - - often. I will need you to continue to grow in your discipleship.

Friends, I do not take the honor or responsibility of being your Acting Pastor lightly, nor do I take it for granted. As I sign my new Call Letter and as I prepare for January 2nd, I renew my covenant with you: That I will serve you faithfully, truthfully, and transparently, with passion and compassion, committed to having an open mind and open heart, guided by the Holy Spirit.

As I said to Pastor Andrea and our Chair of Trustees Alice Barber when she shared the outcome of the vote with me, "Well, here we go!" And I am immensely thankful that we are "going" together.

Peace & Blessings,

Preaching the Word

The Bible is the Word of God in the midst of the words of the writers. - Karl Barth

The Word of God is Divine, but the words of the Bible reflect the inspiration and prejudices of their time. Every word of the Bible is not The Word! Preaching is the art of interpreting the words in the Bible in the context of their time and place and making these passages relevant to our lives in our own time and place. But this is not always an easy task. Even the prophet Jeremiah said to God, when called to preach "Ah Lord, I do not know how to preach for I am only a youth."

I have two brothers, named Chuck and Bobby. Chuck went to Princeton Theological Seminary. He had a good theological mind, but the first time he entered the pulpit to preach he fainted halfway through the sermon. The second time he preached, he fainted again. Having quite literally fallen out of the pulpit twice in front of his congregation, he decided it was time for a vocational change and became a lumber salesman. Bobby went to seminary in Scotland. He won his college public speaking contest. But whereas he was an excellent speaker, as a minister he struggled with what to say week after week. Time and again he woke up in the middle of the night in a cold sweat, thinking he was standing in the pulpit with nothing to say. He became a boat builder. Preaching was not easy for him either.

For the past 13 years we have been blessed to be able to have Pastor Andrea Ayvazian as our preacher, and to hear one of the best preachers in our country today. I don't know how she has done it so successfully week after week, but her sermons have been memorable, like the sermon "Thou Shall Not Bully" based on the 10 Commandments in The Book of Exodus after she asked each of us to write one commandment to guide us on our journey. "Live simply so other may simply live," someone wrote. "Be the fullest, best person you can be in God's eyes," wrote another. And "Honor the divine person in everyone you meet." But it was what the children wrote that was most memorable. This from a 9-year-old boy, "Thou shall not be mean to anyone." This from a 13-year-old girl "Thou shall not bully," and from a 6-year-old girl, "Be kind."

Or her sermon, "Jesus did not die for our sins." "Maybe Jesus died *because* of our sins, or the sins of the world, the sins of humanity, like greed, the lust for power, the love of violence, but Jesus did not die for your personal sins. Marcus Borg is right; Jesus' death on the cross matters, but

not because he paid for our sins. You were not born sinful. You were not born with original sin. You were born with original blessing. As we hear often in the Benediction, you were born perfect and whole. Jesus did not die for our sins. That makes his life, work, mission and ministry too small. Jesus came to usher in the kingdom of God on earth, and that was too threatening. "That is the truth of the cross," Pastor Andrea said to us that Sunday.

Or the sermon about returning to Oberlin College for her 40th reunion with the fear she wouldn't be remembered by anyone there. And all of a sudden she saw her old beloved professor on the other side of the room. And she walked up behind him frightened he wouldn't remember her. "Hi" she said, "I'm Andrea, do you remember me?" A big radiant smile came over his face and he said, "Oh Andrea, of course, I've been looking for you." What a feeling! And that is the way Pastor Andrea has made us feel every time we've come through the door of the Haydenville Congregational Church. "Hi Everyone, God has been looking for you, Jesus has been looking for you and I have been looking for you. WELCOME."

Rev. Peter B. Ives, Theologian-in-Residence

December Birthdays!

- 2 Laurie Priest
- Karen Browne-Courage
- 5 Tarra Chenoa-Neff
- 6 Gretchen Browne-Courage
- Maureen Mathers
- 9 Cathy Strader
- 10 Ann Turner
- Lynn Goodhue
- 13 Talya Gilman-Solomon
- 17 Judy Swanson
- 18 Carol Wolfram
- 20 Jennifer Griswold
- 21 Grace Molano
- 27 Mary Kate Farley-Dimino
- Regina Kaufman
- 28 Ellen Tobiassen
- 30 Jennifer Matias



YOU Can Be a Worship Leader!

Starting with our Worship Service on January 8th, Pastor Chris is inviting people to help "Widen Our Worship" by taking on Worship leadership roles. Such roles would include leading prayers, Invitation to the Offering, co-leading the Welcome, and sharing the News of the Community among other things. Pastor Chris will gladly collaborate with you and offer tips/training. Please contact Pastor Chris (revcjm@gmail.com or (860) 966-8055) if you are interested, and thank you!

What's Next?

Ok, the unimaginable has happened. Trump has won. The Donald and his rather "Soprano" family will grace the hallowed halls where Jefferson walked, Lincoln paced,



FDR wheeled his chair, and the classiest act of all—President Obama, Michelle, and their two daughters—have spent 8 years. Not to mention Hilary and Bill.

Ack, as my second-born would say. When

I first heard the news, I could feel the depression wheel going into high gear. I could literally hear it humming within as despair, craziness, incomprehension, anger, and a host of other things I am not supposed to be doing as a Catholic whirred around on the wheel. Ack. As I said.

Then, after about an hour of two of overeating, looking at every Twitter on my feed that I could find that was political, reading the Times and the Guardian—oh, and did I mention that I prayed Annie Lamott's favorite prayer-- *helphelp*? Sorry, I can't get to the *thank you* part yet.

Then, something settled inside, probably that grace-filled, forgiving Holy Spirit who comes to visit me when I am in unstable mode. It said, "Go forth and do something. Do not sit in despair. Be proactive, babe." Could have been "dame," I am not so sure. In my mind, the Holy Spirit tends to channel 1940s films.

So, I got up, exercised, showered, put on makeup, got dressed, put in earrings, sprayed perfume, and sallied forth to The Market in Williamsburg, which we oldies still call Lens in honor of the man in the butcher's hat who used to run it. Like in the Pleistocene.

I collected: 2 tuna fish cans, peanut butter, Life Cereal, pineapple chunks, raspberry jam, spaghetti, pasta sauce, and a host of other goodies which filled two brown bags. Then I drove to the pharmacy to buy disposable diapers and wipies, for as we know, poor women trying to get into the work force have to provide diapers for their little ones in Day Care. Off I drove to the Survival Center, if not exactly humming, at least not spitting.

As I delivered the packages, I said to the kind man at the desk, "I am returning good for evil." He laughed. I said, "I have to pick up my game and do more, 'cause Donald

ain't gonna do it!" Another lady came around the corner and said loudly, "Yes, we've got to do more!" At the end, we all pumped our fists in the air, kind of like a mini-rally, a rally for refusing to be downhearted and committed to doing better. This definitely felt good.

As I am still in recovery mode, I needed to take a nap and pray. As I was praying about the election results and how sad they made me, this insight came winging in: "My story is bigger than this story." Huh. Ok, God. That sounds about right to me. We are held in your universe, in your light and love. It's still up to us to make things right, but wrongdoing does not have the last word. Hope has the last word.

As Christians, we are pretty sure that optimism is not what is given to us. There's a certain amount of hiding one's eyes if you want to hold onto optimism. However, hope is different. As St. Paul wrote so beautifully in Romans 5:5:

And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

We are not alone in this. We have community, friends, faith, church activism, and my favorite opinion writer Frank Bruni who said yesterday, "The one thing we know about Trump is that he is inconsistent. He says one thing and does another."

So he may promise a wall—unlikely and expensive. He may promise exiling all Muslims—unconstitutional, we still operate under the rule of law here. And in two more years, the mid-term elections will come up, and we can vote people out of office!

I'm not saying I'm not worried: I am. Deeply, especially about climate change. I'm not saying I think things will turn out all right. They may not. But I am saying that by being proactive, keeping faith, reading hopeful Scriptures (Try Isaiah, Micah, and Amos for words on justice), being loving, and reaching out to the marginalized, we might—just might—make it through the next four years with our reason intact.

- Annie Turner

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

-John 14:27

My Three W's

My Sunday School assignment was to come up here and tell you about my "3 W's" – the Why I came, Why I stay and What is the future.

I came to Haydenville Congregational Church because I needed to find a new Church home, a new house of worship that would help fill a developing void in my life.

Sundays and Church have been an important part of my life, helping rid me of the ho-hum of the work week and everyday life, and inspiring me to start anew.

I was not getting that lift and that joy from my previous Church for a variety of reasons and realized that for my sake, and my spiritual journey, I needed to make a change.

I am staying here for several reasons – and I am looking out on the face of many of those reasons – YOU. You are a loving, caring family. Your worship is inspiring, and speaks to all.

This is a HAPPY Church. The Holy Spirit is already here, and not knocking on the door, asking to be let in.

I feel comfortable here – my needs are being met. And what I especially love about this Church is that it moves with the times. So many Churches are stuck in hidebound traditions – and old traditions are not always the best. This Church moves forward, be it through jazz music at Christmas, or the children of the Church participating in a baptism, or the request for comments on the pastor's sermon. When a Church is willing to move forward in its ideas, it assures that it will be a long-lasting family for generations to come.

And, I stay here because our motto is: *"whoever you are, wherever you are on life's journey, you are welcome here."*

My hopes and prayers for HCC for the future are much the same as a parent wishes for a child: that you continue to be the wonderful being that you are. Learn and grow and love and live.

There will be changes – but change can be good, it can be positive. It will be what we make it.

This Church – you of this Church – have been recognized by the UCC Council as a model of what Jesus' Church should be – a home of love, and support, of generosity and acceptance, of open hearts and caring goodness. Truly, this is the definition of Christian faith.

I now assign each one of you the same joyous task that I have had – review your own "3 W's" – and I would add one more - Wisdom.

Act wisely in your personal reflection. Decide what is the best Pledge formula for you and your family. Ponder and reflect on the joys and the support that this Church has given you, and give the same love back to your Church.

Remember – God is in Charge.

God Bless you and thank you.

- Al Neal (for the 2016 Stewardship Campaign)

Special Christmas Day Service!

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 at 10:00 am 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!

To work for peace and justice, we begin with the individual practice of love, because it is there that we can experience firsthand love's transformative power.

- bell hooks

Looking for the Perfect Present for Someone You Love?

Why not give a gift to the **Pastor's Discretionary Fund** in someone's name? The Pastor's Discretionary Fund provides immediate relief/support to parishioners who need money for gas, medications, food, or other small emergency needs. The Discretionary Fund is currently low, and we are going into cold and lonely months. Gifts of any amount are welcome. Checks can be made payable to: Haydenville Congregational Church with "Discretionary Fund" on the memo line. Gifts can be given to Pastor Andrea. Thank you, in advance, for your generosity.

Calendar for December

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

Thank you "Pooh Bears" for providing the coffee hour goodies during December.

Date	Time	Event	Location
Thurs. Dec. 1	9:30 am	Café Office Hours	Dining Room
	6:30 pm	Diaconate Meeting	Dining Room
Sun. Dec. 4	4:00 pm	Evensong Style Worship Service with Communion and Baptism, <i>see page 9</i>	Sanctuary
Tues. Dec. 6	5:30 pm	Soup, Salad and Social Change with Police Chief Jody Kasper	Dining Room
Wed. Dec. 7	7:00 pm	Choir Practice	Sanctuary
Thurs. Dec. 8	9:30 am	Café Office Hours	Dining Room
	5:30 pm	Trustee Meeting	Dining Room
	6:00 pm	Women's Fellowship Meeting	Mariel's House
Sun. Dec. 11	10:00 am	Worship Service with Christmas Pageant	Sanctuary
	12:00 pm	Council Meeting	Sanctuary
Tues. Dec. 13	6:00 pm	Men's Fellowship Meeting	Dining Room
Wed. Dec. 14	7:00 pm	Choir Practice	Sanctuary
	6:00 pm	Children's and Family Ministries Committee Meeting	Children's Church
Thurs. Dec. 15	9:30 am	Final Café Office Hours, Potluck Brunch	Dining Room
	6:00 pm	Journey Support Group	Sanctuary
Sat. Dec. 17	2:00 pm	Trans Writing Group	Dining Room
Sun. Dec. 18	10:00 am	Worship Service with Baptism	Sanctuary
	6:30 pm	Ordination Service with Yohah Ralph, all welcome	Sanctuary/Dining Room
Mon. Dec. 19	6:00 pm	Peace and Justice Meeting	TBD
Tues. Dec. 20	7:00 pm	Blue Christmas Worship Service, <i>see page 9</i>	Sanctuary
Wed. Dec. 21	7:00 pm	Choir Practice	Sanctuary
Sat. Dec. 24	7:00 pm	Christmas Eve Service	Sanctuary
Sun. Dec. 25		Christmas Day	
	10:00 am	Christmas Worship Service with Light Brunch, <i>see page 6</i>	Dining Room
Sun. Jan. 1	10:00 am	Worship Service with Communion	Sanctuary
	11:30 am	Andrea's Good Goodbye Potluck Lunch/Open House	Dining Room

Visioning

On Sunday, November 6, 2016, 46 members of our Congregation stayed after the service for our Visioning: Next Steps meeting. Pastor Chris and the members of the Visioning Committee presented the seven key themes that have emerged over the course of our many visioning events. Pastor Chris also discussed the "Ongoing and Guiding Commitments" that we have identified and will continue to follow as we go forward.

The seven Visioning Topics were handed out for all to review. For each topic, Pastor Chris asked individuals to speak to the topic that resonated the most to them, and explain the importance it has within our Congregation. Pastor Chris explained that we will be prioritizing what topics to work on first, but that all these topics will be part of our ongoing work as a church. Here are the topics:

1. Inclusion/Welcome/Diversity
2. Activism - Social Justice/Environment/Peace
3. Spiritual Growth - God-Centered/Pro Jesus/Contemplative Prayer
4. Nurture and Support of Child and Youth Faith Formation
5. Increase Physical Space Access
6. Increase Connections to other Churches/Mosques/Synagogues
7. Increase Public Voice and Presence in the Community

After this discussion, each attendee was given three voting dots, and was asked to vote for their 1st, 2nd and 3rd highest priority topics, those they would like to work on in 2017. The votes were prorated as follows: A vote of 1 = 3 points, 2 = 2 points, 3 = 3 points. The voting results were as follows:

1. Inclusion/Welcome/Diversity	86 pts
2. Spiritual Growth	71 pts
3. Activism	54 pts
4. Nurture of Child and Youth	31 pts
5. Increase Connection to Other Churches	19 pts
6. Increase Physical Space	4 pts
7. Increase Public Voice Presence	4 pts

Then the members of the congregation were asked to write their name under the topic they are ready to work on as we go forward.

Please stay tuned for updates on how the Visioning Committee will be turning these prioritized themes into actions in the coming months.

- Ruth Jacobsen-Hardy, Lisa Hall, Pastor Andrea, Pastor Chris, Lynn Fogg, Jan Varnon, Sam Icklan

Children's Church Creates Kits for Babies in Need

A few Sundays ago, the older children in Children's Church put together 16 baby kits for donation to Church World Service. We had received a \$250 matching grant from this group in the fall of 2015. Putting together the kits looked like shopping for baby clothes! The kids did a great job selecting their perfect choices from the piles of clothing, diapers, blankets, sweaters and t-shirts. These kits will go out to babies in need in disaster areas or to refugees.

- Maureen Ricksgers



Enduring Understandings

Your Peace & Justice Committee read twelve principles of sustainability in a *Gazette* article, announcing that the Hitchcock Center has adopted these principles, developed by the 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 third - to ponder and imagine what our world would be like if this were what we all believed, if this were how we thought and acted. - Lisa Hall

3. Healthy systems have limits. Rather than exceeding or ignoring the limits, tap the power of limits. Constraints drive creativity.

Blue Christmas Worship Service

Tuesday, December 20th at 7:00 pm in the Sanctuary

A healing service for those who find Christmas less-than-merry...

Let's face it, holidays can bring a mix of complex emotions for some of us - - the stress of gift shopping, challenged family relationships, living a long distance from families, the high expectation of joy when you just might not be feeling it. Whatever it might be for you, if Christmastime joy is hard to find, please consider coming to this brief service of reflection led by Pastor Chris and the Deacons where you are free to acknowledge your feelings and experience the holiday in your own way. We'd love to see you there.

Hot Chocolate Run and Evensong-style worship!

Because so many church members are involved in the Annual Hot Chocolate Run that raises money for Safe Passage—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 "Run" this year without worrying about the conflict with our morning worship service!

From the Deacons' Bench

The Good Goodbye

Years go by quickly, don't they? The arrival of 2017 will certainly be full of changes--from the world stage, and down to our little corner of western Massachusetts, to our big white church. I know there is some anxiety regarding Andrea's retirement. Believe me, our church family will certainly miss her vibrant presence. Still, I can't help but be excited for her as she jumps into her next adventure. And, truth be told, I am pretty eager to see where we, the church family, go next. We have done a lot of growing, changing, visioning, talking, and dreaming this year.

But, change comes with a price, and the price is letting our friend Andrea go.

At our church, we practice extravagant welcomes, joyous acceptance, and what we call "good goodbyes." On Jan 1st, at the beginning of a brand new year, Andrea will preach her last sermon, and say "good bye" to us for a while. Let's send her off with good wishes, and a really great party.

What she wants...what Andrea wants...is a potluck lunch after Church. She wants us, her church family, to gather together for a community meal. Not a fancy dinner, no gala affair, no lofty speeches. A simple gathering, like Jesus used to do, where we can share our greatest gift...time together.

And so, that's what we will do. We have a great committee working on this, and as the time gets closer, we will be asking all of you to help put on a great party. Come find me if you have any thoughts, ideas, or requests. The theme of Andrea's Good Goodbye is "JOY!" We will celebrate our years together, and wish her great success in her next adventure. So, save the date, pick out your favorite recipe to share, and tell me if you have any special ideas.

Thanks, "Saint" Deacon Trish.

This Month In Children's, Youth & Family Ministries

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

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

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.

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

Finding the Perfect Church

"But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us." - 2 Corinthians 4:7

After I retired from active pastoral ministry my wife and I were ecclesiastically homeless for a few years. We went to church, but we couldn't commit to one.

We sometimes felt like Goldilocks at the Bears' residence. One congregation had good preaching, but not so great music. Another had terrific music, but the sermons were on the light side.

This period was an unhappy time in our lives, for we are serious "church nerds" and needed a church home. We knew there was something unfaithful about "church shopping" and being, to use Eugene Peterson's phrase, "tourists and not pilgrims."

The problem was there was no perfect church. Thomas More coined the word *Utopia* in 1516 to describe a

perfect society on a fictional island in the Atlantic Ocean. *Utopia* in Latin means "not a place."

There has never been and there never will be *Utopia*. There is no perfect congregation, just the ones we've got, full of imperfect people that God loves and calls to be the church. And we knew ourselves well enough to realize that if we ever found the perfect church, as soon as we joined it, it wouldn't be perfect anymore.

Prayer

Holy One, bless us all in your church with your extraordinary power, that through your imperfect people, your perfection may shine brightly for the world to see.

- Richard L. Floyd is Pastor Emeritus of First Church of Christ (UCC) in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. A writer and author, his most recent publications are [Romans, Parts 1 and 2](#) (with Michael S. Bennett), new titles in the "Listen Up!" Bible Study Series. He blogs at richardlfloyd.com.

The Christmas Story

We are told that the angel Gabriel came to Mary
a poor, young, frightened girl
and revealed a dangerous secret

*O God, bless all teenage mothers
may they feel your love and protection*

We are told that Joseph should have had
Mary stoned at the edge of the village for disgracing his
honor

*O God, bless all men of courage who choose what is
right over what is expected*

We are told that the couple journeyed far from home
pregnant, in their hour of need, alone

*O God, bless all those who migrate and search
wander and roam, seeking and hoping, on their way*

We are told that there was no room in the inn
no lodging, no bed, no comfort

*O God, bless all those who sleep in doorways and on
sidewalks
on heating grates and beneath bridges
lead them to shelter and safety*

We are told that the baby arrived
with Joseph to attend and animals to witness

*O God, bless all creatures great and small,
they are part of the web of life,
with their beauty and majesty*

We are told that the savior of the world was born in a
manger
a lowly and modest beginning

*O God, bless all born in humble settings
may **we** see the greatness that **you** see in them*

We are told that the family fled to a foreign land
following the birth
fearing the violence that might befall them

*O God, bless all those who escape violence
under the cover of darkness, grant them safe passage,
stay near as they flee*

We are told that the baby named Jesus
grew to be a man who ushered in a revolution
of love and compassion,
nonviolence and mercy, healing and hope

*O God, renew our faith, restore our dreams,
strengthen our belief, and make us brave
for we long to continue the work that Jesus began*

We are told this story year after year

*O God, help us leap from the manger and take up the
cross*

Amen.

- Pastor Andrea (CrossCurrents, December 2015)

Benediction

You are loved.

You belong.

You have a purpose.

You are not alone.

You are a child of God, born perfect and whole.

Go from this place renewed in hope,

strengthened in faith,

restored in love,

and eager to share the gifts of life.

*And know as you go, that the extravagant love of God,
the amazing grace of Jesus,*

*and the transforming presence of the Holy Spirit
are with you this day and all your days. Amen.*

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,
Coach

Laura Paul
Librarian

Shirley Sicurello
Welcome Ministry,
Chair

Julie Salzman
Head Ushers

Laurie Priest
Head Greeter

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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