

KEEPING IN TOUCH!!

January 2024

HAPPY NEW YEAR!!

The First Community Church of Southborough

137 Southville Road

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The Reverend Paul D. Sanderson, D.Min., Ph.D. – Pastor

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NOTE!!

Our Sunday worship service begins at 11:00 a.m. Please stay for coffee, refreshments, and fellowship following the worship service.

Sunday, January 7 is Communion Sunday. All are welcome to share in the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

The Pastor's Message

Greetings!

I wish you all a joyous Christmas season and a happy, healthy New Year, one filled with hope, peace, joy, love, and light, the themes of our Advent season!

In some ways, this Christmas was different for us as a world. Russia's devastation of Ukraine continues. Both Israel and Hamas continue to kill tens of thousands and imperil millions of civilians. As we met this Christmas Eve in our beautiful sanctuary for our candlelight service of lessons and carols, I couldn't help thinking of how difficult it is for people in countries torn by war to celebrate this holy season.

In the little town of Bethlehem, which is located in the West Bank of Palestine, there were no musical festivities; no tree-lighting ceremony; no extravagant decorations; and no tourists on pilgrimage to this holy site. A Lutheran bishop, a friend of mine, has informed me that a Lutheran church in the town of Jesus' birth did put up a creche—but with a sad and symbolic twist. The baby Jesus, wrapped in a keffiyeh, the black-and-white checkered scarf that has become a badge of Palestinian identity, is lying not in a makeshift cradle of hay and wood, but among the rubble of broken bricks, stones, and tiles that represent so much of Gaza's destruction. The site that is believed by many to be the actual place of Jesus' birth is cordoned off with razor wire.

My prayer is that we see the face of Jesus in every child that is killed in Gaza. Then we might learn that war is not the answer.

And yet—we step forward into the New Year with hope!

This past year was a wonderful year in the life of our little church! Although we lost three of our old-time members, Shirley Hutchinson, Bill Guenon, and Thelma Oakes, whose presence we greatly miss, our little church is not only thriving but is actually growing! Over the past year, we have received nine new members into our church, the largest number of new members in a year in several decades! These new members are already making their presence felt as they share their gifts with us in so many ways.

The Board of Trustees is meeting regularly and, in addition to tightening up our finances, are attending to several building repairs that have attracted our notice but have not received the attention they deserve over the past few years. The Diaconate and Stewardship & Growth Committees have been active in promoting worship and fellowship, and the Investment Committee has informed us that this has been a good year for our endowment fund. The Pie Sale went exceptionally well, despite inclement weather, and our recent Stewardship Drive has resulted in what looks to be an increase of approximately 20% from the previous year.

We have a lot to celebrate! Our Spiritual Study & Growth Group, which meets every Tuesday afternoon, has had some excellent discussions of how the theology of the thirteenth-century German mystic, Meister Eckhart, interfaces with the theologies of Rabbi Abraham Heschel, the Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh, and the depth psychologist Carl Gustav

Jung. I particularly celebrate the personal sharing that has become an integral part of our meetings over the past few months. People are connecting with us through our website, reading or listening to my sermons, and are beginning to support us financially because they feel that they are a part of us, even if they live many miles away.

Perhaps most dramatically, this year the Diaconate voted to hold our Christmas Eve Candlelight Service of Lessons and Candles at 7:00 p.m., when it is dark enough to make the “sharing of the light” exceptionally meaningful. This year, over fifty people attended, approximately twice the number that attended our afternoon services the previous few years! It was an absolutely beautiful service!

And now, we step forward into the New Year! We don’t know what the new year will bring to us as a church, but we hope and pray that you will be an important part of our worship, our fellowship, and our mission throughout the coming year. And we hope and pray that, in whatever ways we can, we will be able to bring some hope, peace, joy, love, and light into your life, into your world.

Faithfully yours,
Reverend Paul Sanderson

Interesting (and informative) Quotes

At a seminar held at Bailey Island, Maine in 1936, in response to the question whether complete individuation does away with conflict, Dr. C. G. Jung responded,

“This would mean you would come to a complete standstill. Individuation, on the contrary, means intense consciousness of conflict. You never will be saved from conflict as long as you live, otherwise you would be dead before you die. Conflict cannot be removed. If it seems to be removed, that is imaginary. Conflict must be, if one lives at all. It is absolutely indispensable. But the way you deal with it, that is the question—whether you are overcome by the conflict, whether you get drowned in it, whether you get identified with one or other side of the conflict. Individuation simply means you find your place amidst the turmoil; you keep yourself in the midst of the conflict; you are in the conflict yet above it.”

(Quoted in *Dream Symbols of the Individuation Process*. p. 35.)

LOOKING AHEAD . . .

Saturday, January 6

is the day set aside to celebrate Epiphany. Since it falls on a Saturday this year, we celebrate it on Sunday, January 7. Epiphany, or Three Kings Day, is a special date for many Christians; it's when we celebrate how a star led the Magi - also known as the Three Kings or the Wise Men - to visit the baby Jesus twelve days after he was born. The word "Epiphany" comes from the Greek word meaning "to reveal:" it is when the baby Jesus was "revealed" to the world. Historically, the church also commemorates the baptism of Jesus and the wedding Jesus attended at Cana on this date. It is a time of gift-giving in many traditions.

Monday, January 15

is a day set aside to celebrate the life and ministry of Martin Luther King, Jr. We need to remember him, his message of hope, and his call for us to excise racism from our souls and our society.

Growing in the Faith!

Tuesday afternoon Spiritual Study & Growth Group meets every Tuesday at 2:30 p.m.

We are presently concluding our study of the 13th century German mystic Meister Eckhart with Matthew Fox's comparison of Eckhart and C. G. Jung's teachings about God and the human soul. As we enter into the New Year, we will decide what/whom we will read next.

We have approximately ten people who attend regularly—and each contributes to our excellent discussions. If you have never attended one of our study groups, give us a try—we're not that bad!

Note: We will not be meeting January 2 and January 9.

Welcome to Our New Members!

During our worship service on Sunday, December 9, we welcomed the following members of our church family into full membership with our church:

Jim Duncan

Linda Duncan

Diane Hagan

Carole Jolie

Welcome! We celebrate all you are already bringing and will continue to bring to the enrichment of the worship, fellowship, and mission of our little church, and we hope to play an ever-deepening role in your own spiritual development and growth in the years to come.

Birthdays in January

Alan Towne 17th

Jennifer Dundin 28th

Michael Larson 31th

Thank You!!

Thank you to Cathy Ambler, who once again donated the two wreaths for the front door of the church, and to Rick Belejack, Alan Towne, Darlene Sanderson, Dianne Simmons, Cheryl Holmes, Diane Hagan, Jim & Linda Duncan, Cathy Ambler, Joyce Harrington, and Sandy McKeen for helping decorate our sanctuary for Christmas! This year, thanks to the upgraded decoration of our windows (thanks Cheryl and Rick!), the sanctuary looked better than ever!

Thank you to everyone who has been contributing to the United Parishes of Southborough Food Pantry, which is housed at Pilgrim Church. The food pantry presently serves approximately 75 families from Southborough who are food insecure. Thanks to our two representatives to the United Parishes of Southborough Lay Council, Jim Holmes and Dianne Simmons, and also to Darlene Sanderson and Cheryl Holmes, for organizing the “Food Item of the Week” program.

Thank you to all who, as worship participants, helped make our worship during Advent, on Christmas Eve, and on Christmas Sunday so special.

Advent Candle Readers/Lighters

Hope	Emily Harris & Meagan Ramos
Peace	Lou, Jen, & Olivia Dundin
Joy	Rick Belejack & Alan Towne
Love	Paul & Darlene Sanderson

Christmas Eve

Lighting the Christ Candle Zachary Webster & Beverly Lees

Service of Lessons & Carols

The Prophecy	Cathy Ambler
The Annunciation	Darlene Sanderson
The Journey & The Birth	Sandy McKeen
The Angels	Sandy McKeen
The Shepherds	Linda Duncan
The Coming of the Magi	Karin Farmer
The Light of the World	Rev. Sanderson

Special thanks

- to Cathy Ambler for singing an absolutely beautiful solo Introit: “O Holy Night” for our Christmas Eve candlelight service;
- to Cathy and Darlene for singing an absolutely beautiful anthem, “Hallelujah,” on Christmas Eve,
- to Jim Duncan for serving as our organist for many of the Sundays in Advent and for our Christmas Eve day and evening services;
- to Jim and Linda Duncan for the beautiful organ-piano duet on Christmas Eve;
- to Bob L’Heureux, still recovering from two knee replacement surgeries, for gracing us with our special bulletins throughout Advent and on Christmas Eve.

It was also great to see Mitchell Hilbert and his new bride, Dana Reuter, with us Christmas Eve—in from Oregon for the holidays. Mitchell, his brother Tyler, his mother Darcy, and his grandmother Shirley have been an integral part of our church family for several generations. Mitchell and Tyler were members of Reverend Sanderson’s six-year confirmation class.

The Church in the World

I recently rediscovered a cartoon (in color) that I had cut out of a Sunday morning Boston Globe several years ago. The cartoon is entitled “For Better or For Worse.” It is

written by Lynn Johnston and is one of my favorites (along with “Pickles,” “Doonesbury,” “Dustin,” “Arlo & Janis,” “Adam@Home,” and my new favorite, “Crabgrass,” all of which I read “religiously” first thing every morning--a great way to start each day!). The date of this particular “For Better or For Worse” was not included in my excised version, but it had to be around Christmas.

In the cartoon, Michael, who looks to be about eight years old, is reading *The Christmas Story* to his younger sister, who is about two years old. Michael, who seems to be reading directly from a large child’s picture-book, says to his sister,

“Well, they couldn’t stay at the hotel, see? So, the manager says they can sleep in the barn.”

His little sister, pointing at the book, says,

“Look! Baby!”

Michael responds,

“Yeah—a baby. So, they got the baby, see, an’ they put him in the manger, an’ angels were on the roof—an’ there was this star. . . An’ then these three wise guys ‘cided to bring presents, so they got on their camels an’ brought gold an’ two other things. By this time, there was sheep and farmers all over the place—with everyone comin’ in to see the baby!”

At this point, their mother, who has been quietly listening to the reading, interjects,

“Michael, I don’t think you’re reading that story exactly the way it’s written.”

Unperturbed, Michael calmly responds,

“I don’t have to. I know it off my heart.”

As you can guess, I teared up when I read this the first time several years ago, and I teared up again when I recently rediscovered it. This is what it means for each and every one of us to be “the church in the world,” for that is what we are. We take the story of Jesus, his teachings, what little we know of it; what little we remember of it; and live it the very best we can each and every day.

We are able to do this because, like Michael, we know it in our heart.