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# EPISTLE

May, 2016

Bradford Congregational Church – UCC  
Bradford, VT (802) 222-4034



Our website:  
<http://bradforducc.org>  
[bradfordvtucc@gmail.com](mailto:bradfordvtucc@gmail.com)

Dear Church Family,

How can we grow as a congregation?

Everyone wants it. The church needs it in order to survive. But how do we do it?

The results of the survey and small groups that we held when I arrived in the fall of 2014 showed that growth was one of the top aspirations we had. We asked, “What do you dream this church will do or become?” Here are the top five answers and the number of supportive comments each received:

- 58 Growth and Revitalization
- 51 A Positive Attitude and Positive Way of Working
- 48 A Welcoming, Supportive, Loving Community
- 41 Outreach/Mission Work
- 35 Programs for Children and Youth

Our Identity and Aspiration Statement summarized these results in this beautiful vision:

“We aspire to grow in numbers as we make this an increasingly welcoming, loving, helpful congregation where we take the love we find here out into the world around us, and where people want to participate because the church makes a positive difference in their lives throughout the week. We will seek to maintain healthy communication and a positive, hopeful attitude as we face inevitable challenges.... We intend to continue being a

congregation where children are cherished, and where we offer encouragement, support and programs for youth and young families as well as people of all ages. We dream of being a church that shines like a lighted window into the community, a beacon for social justice, increasingly engaged in works of mission and widely known for generously serving those in need.”

It all starts with “We aspire to grow...” How can we do that?

One way is to do everything else in that paragraph, and we have been working in those directions. We have had three highly successful and transformative workshops on healthy communication and beloved community. The feeling among us has generally been positive and loving. Our children’s program and mission work and various ways of serving the community have been extraordinary for a congregation our size.

Yet so far we have not grown much beyond where we were when I arrived. Now is the time to start getting intentional about growth and see what we can do. Here are some things that could help:

### ***“Increasingly Welcoming”***

You will be hearing about the book *Real Good Church: How Our Church Came Back from the Dead and Yours Can, Too* by the Rev. Molly Phinney Baskette. She writes, “We averaged 35 people in worship and had about \$200,000 in the bank.... [Today] our giving has more than quintupled, and we went from six children in Sunday School to close to 100.”

Her UCC church was in an urban setting, but almost everything they did could be done in Bradford, as well. We might not climb back to over 100 in worship. There is no telling what our demographics will support today. It is almost certain, though, that by undertaking some of the common sense tasks that her church did, we will grow.

The Diaconate and I are asking all Committees, Boards and Officers to read sections of this book. It has chapters on:

- The Building
- Children’s Ministry and Adult Spiritual Formation
- Pastoral Care
- Outreach and Social Justice [what we call Mission and Social Action]



- Outreach and Growth
- Finance and Stewardship
- Open and Affirming
- Real Good Worship
- Leadership
- Church Conflict

She introduces the chapter on Outreach and Growth by saying, “I want to be clear that *everything* we did (and do) falls into the category of outreach and growth—all of it. Especially scrubbing mold off the bathroom walls.” (Baskette is *funny* as well as wise!)

We have much that we could do to make our congregation “increasingly welcoming,” and the more we do, the more joy we will feel!

The first thing we all need to do is make sure that we pay special attention to new or recent arrivals in our congregation (what the book calls “newbies”) and make them feel welcome and a part of the church family from the minute they walk through our doors. We each need to take responsibility for this. The more who reach out, the better. If there are 25 regular attenders in worship, it means 25 of us looking around for newcomers after the service and extending ourselves to them in a meaningful way.

There is more to being “increasingly welcoming” than this that the book will teach us—far more than we currently do or even imagine.

### ***“Healthy Communication and a Positive, Hopeful Attitude”***

Twenty-three people from our congregation attended at least one of our recent Healthy Communication and Beloved Community workshops. That is fantastic! That means twenty-three people have learned or relearned some specific skills that can help us fulfill the Communication Guidelines the congregation adopted two years ago.



We have already been implementing these new practices when we have disagreements, conflicts, hurt feelings or a controversial decision to make. The way to change our church culture so that we will not repeat the wounds and divisions of the past is to keep practicing at every opportunity. This is absolutely essential to growth. It will do no good to grow if we communicate in ways that lose the people we have gained, and we are finding that it feels so good and exciting to work through things in a positive way! Our strength and closeness grow as we use these new skills, and that growth will lead to other kinds.

I hope we will compile a healthy communication manual for our Committees, Boards, Church Council and whole congregation to follow whenever we find ourselves facing hard feelings or hard decisions. This will be fairly easy to do thanks to our workshop leader, Nancy Brown, who provided many pages of useful handouts.

***“Take The Love We Find Here Out into The World Around Us”***

We need to tell the community around us about this congregation being a place of love and light. We need to tell the new story because there is an old story out there about the past. Owning the old story brings the opportunity for forgiveness, healing and reconciliation. Telling the new story brings the opportunity for growth.

We can tell the new story by talking with friends and family about the positive experiences of love we have within the church’s walls. We can tell it even more effectively by being instruments of Christ-like love in the community. “They will know we are Christians by our love,” we often sing. The community will know we are a loving congregation by the love we show everywhere we go in town. We represent the church as well as Christ in everything we say and do.

The book *Real Good Church* is full of other ways we can take the love we find here out into the world around us. Some we will be able to copy and others will inspire us to invent our own.

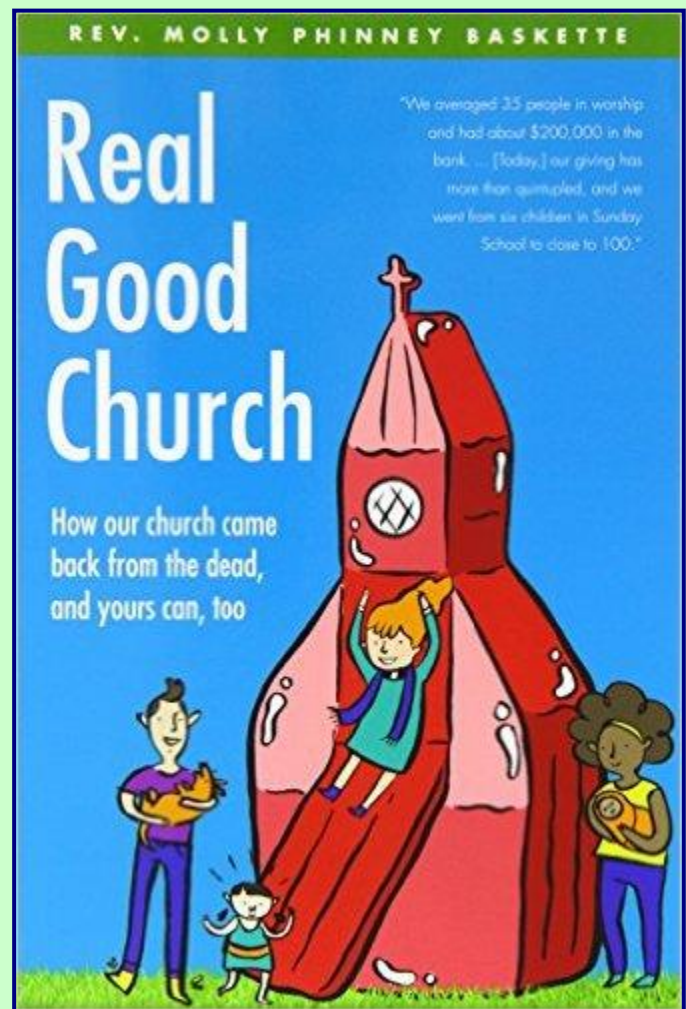
***“Celebrate, Celebrate, Celebrate”***

This is something Molly Baskette says repeatedly in her book. We could do much more celebrating of our congregational life. Celebrating fills us with joy and hope, and it makes people want to be part of the church, so it will grow.

Celebrating means telling the story of what we have been able to do, and allowing ourselves to cheer wildly for it. It means pouring our appreciation out to those who have worked hard to make things happen. It means letting our far-flung friends and the world around us know what we have done or what we have become. It means having celebratory events and showcases.

Like everything else relating to growth, every person in the congregation needs to contribute to this. If your committee, board or group has done something that the church can celebrate, please be sure to let others know. You can tell me or tell the Publicity Committee (Barb Joslin and Storme Odell—and better yet you can JOIN the Publicity Committee!), or tell Bridget Peters who regularly posts things on our Facebook and website News pages. You can also announce your accomplishment in church and tell your friends outside of church.

Celebrating is not “un-Christian.” The word “gospel” means literally “good news.” The church exists because people keep telling the story of what Jesus did and what the Spirit that was in Jesus has inspired his followers to do. Telling that story is how the church has grown from a small band of ragtag bumbling disciples into the vast worldwide band that it is today.



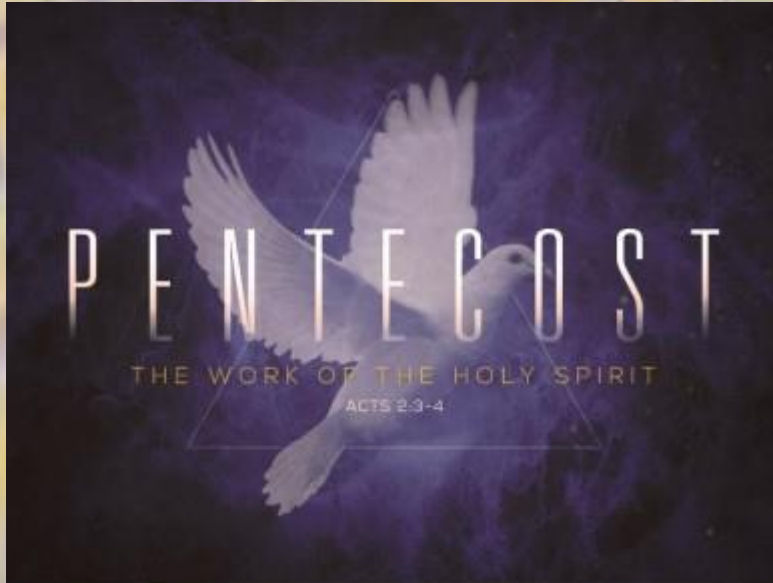


Everyone wants growth. Everyone would like to see the church strong enough to support a full time pastor again. Everyone wants the beautiful Identity and Aspiration vision of this congregation to come true.

Everyone who wants this congregation to flourish has the responsibility to do the things that make for growth.

Now is the time! The Season of Pentecost begins on May 15<sup>th</sup> with the story of the Holy Spirit sweeping into the first church and launching it out into the world. The church grew exponentially as it lived that Spirit-filled life.

Pentecost is the season of growth in the church year when we recall all that the Holy Spirit has done through Christ and through the church in the past. Pentecost begins at planting time and ends after the harvest, with Thanksgiving. It is the perfect time to plant the seeds and start cultivating congregational growth.



Let's grow!

Peace, joy and love,  
Tom



# Worship Time Change!

Please spread the word that  
worship will begin at

**11:00 AM for one joyous  
Sunday, June 5<sup>th</sup>,**

when we will have three special treats:

1. a **joint service** with our friends from the West  
Newbury Congregational Church here in our sanctuary;

2. music provided by the gifted  
**Bruce and Caleb Freeberg** who  
played for us last summer to rave  
reviews; and,

3. a **potluck lunch** after  
worship to which all are invited.





Prayer requests may be directed to [martinastever@yahoo.com](mailto:martinastever@yahoo.com)

It is our privilege to pray for you and those you care about.

We pray for each other, *without ceasing* and your prayer requests are held in strict confidence.

*Would you like the person(s) for whom we are praying to receive a note saying we are lifting up those prayers?*

*Please let us know their address and we will mail it.*

*We keep any names, concerns, and personal information in strict confidence.*



From the Historian  
Profile #9  
Martina (Day) Stever

Martina grew up in Piermont, NH attending Sunday School Youth Fellowship, singing in the choir, and becoming a member of the Piermont Congregational Church. After marrying Bruce Stever she joined the Bradford Congregational Church in 1957. Bruce had followed a similar path in our church and they lived in Bradford.

She has held many offices in our church including Moderator of the Church and Church Council, Secretary and Chairman of the Diaconate, Chairman of the Music Committee, Chairman of the Christian Education Committee, and Secretary of the Women's Fellowship. Martina is now *Deaconess Emerita*.

Activities and Committees she has served on include Ad Hoc Committees: Finance, By-Laws Revision, Ministerial Search, Secretary of the Organ Committee, and Chairman of the Bicentennial Celebration. Activities include Prayer Chain Coordinator, Sunday School teacher, choir member, Bible study student, Worship leader, I-91 Coffee Break, Bazaar, Wild Game Supper, Yard Sale and Hospitality..

Martina said a disappointment in our church is when members leave our church because WE are the church. It is not the building or the Pastor. It is the people who are the church. She went on to say, "I wish we could gather back all who 'left the fold' as they are missed." Martina went on to say she couldn't choose just one activity that she was most pleased with as there were quite a few that stand out in her mind such as: at times of crisis, our church has held special services that have brought the community together. One was following the 9/11/01 terrorist attacks on our country; another was following the arrest of a teacher charged with sexual abuse of a child. We have been leaders in promoting ecumenical services and programs. She mentioned a couple of other activities that stand out in her mind -- the Palm Sunday Choir Festival which is such an uplifting experience and the church is filled with music. She went on to say, "I must mention our famous Wild Game Supper that involves so many volunteers from the community and brings pleasure to all who attend for the fellowship as well as the meal."

Eris, Historian

## Lectionary Readings May (year C)

May 1 – 6th Sunday of Easter

Acts 16:9-15

Rev 21:10, 22-22:5

John 14:23-29

Psalm 67

May 8 – 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

Acts 16:16-34

Rev. 22:12-14,16-17,20-21

John 17:20-26

Psalm 97

May 15 – Pentecost

Acts 2:1-21

Romans 8:14-17

John 14:8-17

Psalm 104:24-34,35b

May 22 – Trinity Sunday

Proverbs 8:1-4,22-31

Romans 5:1-5

John 16:12-15

Psalm 8

May 29

I Kings 18:20-21,30-39

Galatians 1:1-12

Luke 7:1-10

Psalm 96

# Congregational Church of the United Church of Christ, Bradford, VT

“The Church of the Lighted Window “ “An Historic Congregational Church”  
“Wherever you are on your Spiritual Journey, You are Welcome Here!”

May 1, 2016

Dear Members and Friends:

The 205th Annual Meeting of the Congregational Church of the United Church of Christ, Bradford, Vermont, will convene on Thursday, May 19, at 7:00pm in the Church Vestry.

The annual reports of the various officers, boards, committees and organizations for the past year are included in this booklet. We hope you will take the time to read these reports and bring the booklet to the meeting with any questions, suggestions or concerns you may have.

## AGENDA

**OPENING- Recite Covenant Together:** Daniel Perry II, Assistant Moderator

**APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF 2015 ANNUAL MEETING:** Barbara Joslyn, Clerk

### **HEAR AND ACT ON THE REPORTS OF:**

1. Treasurer
2. Trust Fund Committee
3. All Other Reports

### **OLD BUSINESS**

### **NEW BUSINESS**

1. Nominating Committee Report for 2016-2017
2. Proposed budget for 2016-2017
3. Shall we reduce the Trust Fund's value by \$10,000 to supplement the annual budget.
4. Shall we reduce the Trust Fund's value by \$10,000 to supplement the Building Campaign Act 'n' Spire.
5. Other business

### **ADJOURNMENT**

### **CLOSING PRAYER**

Sincerely,

*Daniel Perry II, Assistant Moderator*  
*Barbara Joslyn, Clerk*



## Sunday school News



During late March and into April, the Sunday school students have been focusing on the Easter season and the stories of Jesus' death, resurrection, and those who believe in Jesus. Children have been focusing on John 20:29, "Happy are those who do not see and yet believe." Much time has been spent talking about the things that the children believe in, but yet cannot see, touch, or prove to exist.



The children have also been talking about how they can follow Jesus' teachings in their lives; be nice to others, help others, be

respectful and kind to all and treating others as the children would hope to be treated.



We have also discussed the Holy Trinity which symbolizes the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost (Spirit).

This led to an outdoor scavenger hunt looking for ten different spring items, three of each. Sunday school has taken advantage of the beautiful weather and ventured out on walks, looking at the beauty of our town.

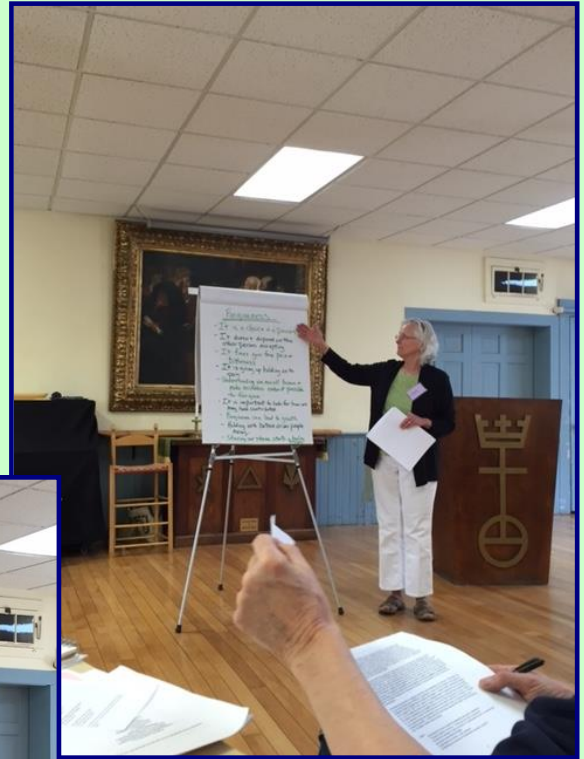
On May 22nd, part of the service will be dedicated to Children's Sunday. The church will celebrate the attendance and participation of the children over the past year at Bradford Congregational Church. Please join the Christian Education committee in celebrating our children!

As always, thank you all for your continuing support for the children. Your conversations with them and interest in their projects really help them feel great about their church!









April 23rd

Scenes from the final



Healthy Communications and Beloved Community workshop