

EPISTLE

November, 2016

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

Our website: <http://bradforducc.org>
email us at: bradfordvtucc@gmail.com

see us on Facebook: [Bradford Congregational Church](#)
Dear Church Family,



Our church leadership is reading the book *Real Good Church* by the Rev. Molly Phinney Baskette. The subtitle is “How our church came back from the dead, and yours can, too.”

The book is funny, smart and optimistic about the possibility of churches surviving and thriving if (and only if) they respond creatively to the rapidly changing times. The book is also realistic about the challenges we face. In an early section entitled “The Danger We Are In,” Baskette writes:

When I was working with the church growth consultants Paul Nickerson and Jim Griffiths back in 2005, they said that in twenty years all the unhealthy churches would be dead. They will have run out of money and out of people, and only the churches that had figured out relevancy and authenticity and healthy communication would be left.

Baskette believes that only 20% of mainline churches like ours will survive. She writes, “We as leaders have to create a sense of urgency around renewal and change, or it will be too late for some of us.”

I believe this congregation has a very good chance of being one of the survivors. I believe it not because of the church's rich traditions and many gifts and assets, but because in the two years I have been here I have seen your leadership's "sense of urgency around renewal and change" working steadily in the direction of "relevancy and authenticity and healthy communication."

Not everyone here shares that vision, but as Baskette points out, "We don't have time to make sure every single person in our congregation feels totally OK about proposed changes, because that's never going to happen." She explains that some of us are more risk averse than others, and some will simply never agree to change. What matters to Baskette is not that everyone agree, but that the dominant culture of the church become one of relevancy, authenticity and healthy communication, right now, with no time to lose.

This does not mean to be cold-hearted to those who are not on board. The leadership of this congregation clearly would prefer that "every single person in our congregation 'feel' totally OK." Everyone regrets having to move forward without that. This congregation has shown that we can have "a sense of urgency around renewal and change" while acting with care, compassion and Christ-like love toward all, walking together as a beloved community even when we disagree.

Not everyone may share the vision of the congregation's movement toward "relevancy and authenticity and healthy communication," but we do share a vision of the church we want to be. The Church Council's Steering Committee listened to all who were willing to share their thoughts and feelings as they worked to discern who we are and what God is calling us to do and be. As a result of that careful process, our Identity and Aspiration Statement passed unanimously at a warned congregational meeting.

Having a shared vision and mission is essential to being one of the congregations that survives. It is our road map to authenticity—if we are working toward the goals expressed in the Identity and Aspiration Statement we know we are being true to who we are. Our particular vision is also a road map to relevancy and healthy communication. The three keys to success are right there, built into the Statement.

Please take a minute to read this excerpt afresh noting each phrase that reflects either relevancy, authenticity or healthy communication:

The Congregational Church of the United Church of Christ, Bradford, Vermont, strives to be a loving church family where everyone feels welcome and at home, appreciated and supported. We want our faith community to be a safe, comfortable place for worship and spiritual growth.... 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 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.



Those are stirring words! One of our Trustees said, “Who would *not* want to belong to that church?”

Nor are they just words. A circle of twenty or so people met in the vestry after worship on October 16th. They met to learn about and discuss a highly relevant issue: sexual orientation and gender identity in the context of the church, our families and society.

They heard presentations by Angela Schlager, who teaches gender studies at Hartford High, and Joyce McKeeman and Pastor Cass Poulos who both

grew up in UCC churches and knew from a very early age that they were different from their heterosexual peers. We heard about the painful feelings of isolation and rejection LGBTQ people can experience even in the midst of ostensibly friendly, welcoming congregations, sensing that the welcome does not extend to them. They explained why affirming is such an important word. “Affirming” says that a church operates on the belief that all of us are beloved children of God, just as we are, including LGBTQ people.

The courage of everyone in the circle was extraordinary. People were absolutely authentic. In the end everyone shared their truth. Some of us had clearly been changed in profound ways by listening with respect and trying to understand. It was relevant to us as individuals because we gained insights into the experience of people in our lives who are not heterosexual. It was relevant to us as a church because we are likely to have highly qualified gay and lesbian ministerial candidates as well as LGBTQ parishioners. The circle also bore witness to how much this congregation has learned about simple, basic healthy communication skills. We shared our differences in such a way that we grew closer, rather than being divided.

This discussion was part of a series leading up to a vote on November 20th about whether we will undertake a study of what it would mean to become designated as a UCC Open and Affirming (ONA) congregation—certified as being open to and affirming of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. This is the second vote of three that would have to be taken in order to become ONA. The entire process is the result of “a sense of urgency around renewal and change” felt by both the Search Committee and the Diaconate. It is taking seriously our calling “to be a loving church family where everyone feels welcome and at home, appreciated and supported,” and to be “a church that shines like a lighted window into the community, a beacon for social justice.”

I am remaining neutral on how you should vote so that I may be available as pastor to people of all perspectives, but I am far from neutral on how you are going through the process. I feel excited and deeply moved to be part of a congregation that is doing such important work in such an exemplary way!

I look forward to walking with you this last stretch of the interim journey and doing all I can to help you live into the beautiful and hopeful vision of the church you long to be.

Thank you!
Grace and peace,
Tom



Prayer requests may be emailed to
[click here](#)

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.

Dear Church Family,

We are writing to let you know about a warned Congregational Meeting to be held on **Sunday, November 20th** immediately following worship. The meeting will be asked to decide whether the congregation should undertake an education and discussion series on the meaning of an Open & Affirming designation.

The Diaconate has appointed us as an ad hoc committee to oversee a process that could eventually lead to the congregation voting whether or not it will declare itself an Open and Affirming Congregation. “Open and Affirming (ONA) is the United Church of Christ’s (UCC) designation for congregations which make a public covenant of welcome into their full life and ministry to persons of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions.” (from the national UCC website)

The Diaconate has adopted the following careful process based on our assessment of our congregation and the experience of other churches. There are three distinct steps, each voted separately by the membership. The process can end with a negative vote at any of the three junctures.

Step 1) As a result of an affirmative vote this summer, we are holding several informative and educational sessions on the subject of sexual identity and gender identification. In September there was a Bible Study led by the Rev. Mark Pitton examining key scriptures and, a showing of a documentary film to give us more information and context for sexual orientation and gender identity issues. On October 16th after worship there will be a panel discussion with a minister, teacher, and lay leader discussing their experiences and insights on these issues, and in on November 6th after worship there will be a circle gathering to discuss our personal experiences.

Step 2) At the end of Step 1, on November 20th after worship, the congregation will vote whether to take the second step which would be to examine what it would mean for us to become a UCC “Open and Affirming” designated Congregation, holding one or more congregational meetings for education and discussion. Because more than a few in our congregation have thought we are already Open & Affirming, these sessions will explain what the designation means and how it is different from being welcoming.

Step 3) At the end of that process our church members vote whether or not to become a designated Open and Affirming congregation.

The background on this project began in the Pastoral Search Committee. When the recently completed Search surveys came back they contained something bold and beautiful ... that three quarters of our congregation favors participating in an Open and Affirming study/discernment process!

It brought the Search Committee's meeting to an exciting standstill and they unanimously decided to ask the Diaconate if they want to pursue this now, given that prospective ministers will need to know where our congregation stands on this issue. The Diaconate unanimously supported the idea of proposing a process to the congregation.

Speaking as members of the Search Committee, Diaconate and greater congregation, we feel that this process is about living into our congregation's Identity and Aspiration Statement: "to be a loving church family where everyone feels welcome and at home, appreciated and supported.... to make this an increasingly welcoming, loving, helpful congregation."

For this reason the Diaconate is calling for a congregational vote **immediately following the worship service on November 20, 2016.**

<p>"Shall the Congregational Church of the United Church of Christ, Bradford, Vermont engage in a series of education and discussion sessions about the United Church of Christ's "Open & Affirming" designation as the second step in a process that could result in the congregation declaring itself Open and Affirming?"</p>
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Yours in Christ,
The Diaconate ad hoc Open and Affirming Committee
Bridget Peters and Marcia Tomlinson

New for 2016's Game Supper!

Cajun Elk Burritos



A taste panel consisting of David McLam, Dan & Tracey Smith and Willow gathered in September to sample three varieties and chose the one with black beans. Come Game Supper Day, our diners will each receive a burrito filled with the cheese, peppers, beans and elk kicked up a notch with David's own Cajun spices!

These will be rolled on Thursday, Nov. 10th, continuing on the 11th if needed.

Can you help? Contact Marcia Tomlinson at 449-4689 or email at [***click here***](#)

November 6th Sharing Circle

A few months ago we held a special church meeting to decide whether or not we would host educational sessions on the subject of gender identity and sexual orientation, as well as other issues surrounding LGBTQ in our culture, community, church, and homes.

On Nov. 6th we will host the final of these sessions at which we will gather in a circle discussion of how this all impacts us on a personal level. This gathering will take place right after worship and coffee hour.

**PLEASE. We have learned so much.
Come sit, listen, speak, share, learn.**

Diaconate ad hoc ONA Committee



From the Historian
(continued from the October, 2016 Epistle)

The Memorial Fund balances as of October, 2016

Anita Perry	\$ 25.00
Dorothy Cole	240.00
Herb Perryman	400.00
Muriel Brainerd	375.00
Nancy Perry	907.85
Patrick Tomlinson	820.00
Roger Terrill	6.80
Interest	161.67
Total	\$ 2,936.32

The interest of \$161.67 should be assigned to individual accounts.

Eris, Historian

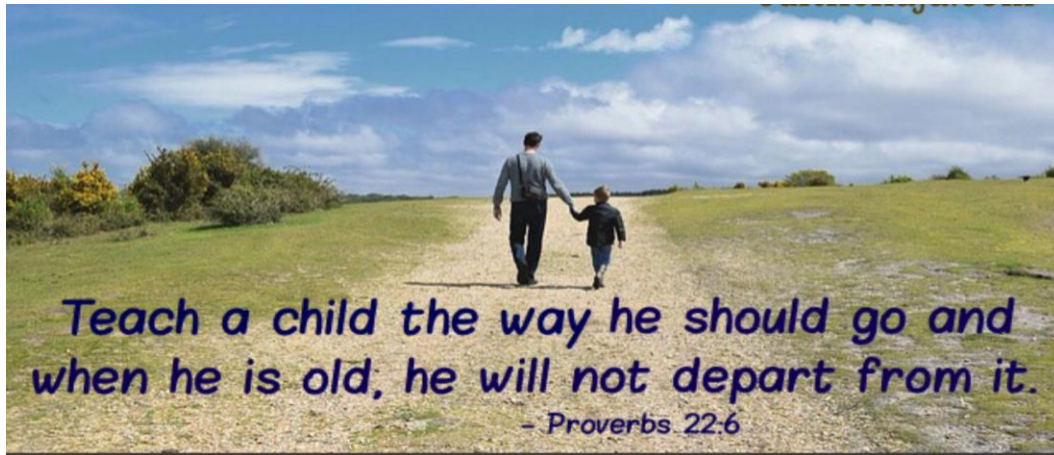
“Why Church?”

a letter to the Groveland, Massachusetts Congregational Church
from Sandy Perry Keene

As a child, it seemed like my parents were constantly dragging us to church. Getting four children and themselves ready was not an easy task. Amazingly, we were all clean, nicely dressed, and most prompt. We were rarely given the choice to go to church, but rather we went because our parents told us to go. As we grew, the reins loosened a bit. Mom and Dad continued to encourage us to participate in the life of the church. We taught Sunday School, sang in the choir, went to Youth Fellowship, and helped with special church-wide projects. I have fond memories of smiles and fun, friendships and kindness, hard work and great accomplishments. In my twenties, life was more transient and career focused. I would visit my hometown church during the holidays but that was about it. And in my thirties, I married and started a family here in Massachusetts. Religion was coming full circle.

Why did our parents insist that we attend church? Church seemed to teach us about respect and faith. RESPECT. Going to church showed respect for our parents because it made them happy. Going to church showed respect for others, too. Physically being there outwardly showed support to the church, its beliefs and its missions. And mostly, going to church showed respect for God. As our Father and Creator, He was remembered and appreciated! FAITH. Going to church gave us the opportunity to explore our faith and learn about God. Our parents knew from experience that having faith in God would help us through difficult times later in life. They wanted us to understand that God would support us no matter what. He is there to help guide us and comfort us. Talking about these ideas was one thing. Putting these ideas into action was another. Our ancestors went to church, our friends went to church, our family went to church. It's just what we did.

Today, I hear many parents (myself included) say that life is more complicated now. There are many distractions that pull at our religious focus. Studies show that church attendance is dropping off. There are



children all over growing up without a faith community. But where will these kids be in 10 years? In 20 years? How will religion impact their lives later if it isn't even in their lives today?

The biggest reason why I come to church and bring my children (albeit not as often or successfully as my parents!) is because I want them to know God. Coming to church helps make God relevant. I want them to see me exercise my belief in God so that they will do the same for themselves and their children someday. I want them to see the love and support that a faith community gives to one another. I want them to have a place to share their talents and contribute to improving the lives of others. I wish for them to know a special place that's safe and full of love.

My parents ... very wise. Thanks be to God.



Lectionary Readings **NOVEMBER** (ending year C)

Nov 6 -

Haggai 1: 15b - 2:9 (get on with the Temple rebuilding!)

2 Thess 2: 1-5, 13-17 (Lord, encourage and strengthen your servants)

Luke 20: 27-38 (Resurrection is so much more than you know)

Psalms 145: 1-5, 17-21 (God is great and good)

theme hymn: *God of Our Life, Through All the Circling Years*

Nov 13 -

Isaiah 65: 17-25 (a new vision, a call for joy)

2 Thess 3: 6-13 (persist in doing well ... and good)

Luke 21: 5-19 (focus on now, not “signs” and portents)

Isaiah 12 (song of thanksgiving)

theme hymn: *Christ, Whose Glory Fills the Skies*

Nov 20 - Christ the King Sunday, Thanksgiving Sunday

Jeremiah 23: 1-6 (behold, the days are coming ...)

Col 1: 11-20 (praise God for the transformation of Christ's followers)

Luke 23: 33-43 (forgiveness, unconditional, freely offered)

theme hymn: *Crown Him with Many Crowns*

Nov 24 - Thanksgiving Day

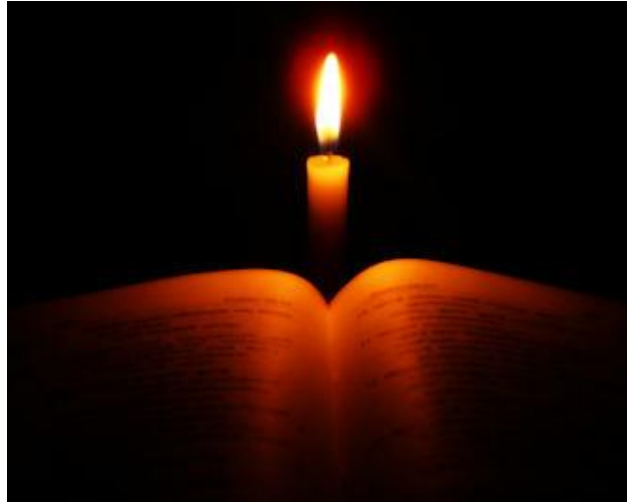
Deut 26: 1-11 (offer your first-fruits to the Lord)

Phil 4: 4-9 (practice whatever is praiseworthy)

John 6: 25-35 (“I am the bread of life”)

Psalms 100 (all lands are summoned to praise God)

theme hymn: *Now Thank We All Our God*



Lectionary Readings NOV/DEC (start of year A)

Nov 27 - 1st Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 2: 1-5 (a vision of unity and peace)

Romans 13: 11-14 (live as the people of light)

Matt 24: 36-44 (be vigilant, be prepared, joy is coming)

Psalm 122 (song of praise and prayer for Jerusalem)

theme hymn: *Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus*

Dec 4 - 2nd Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 11: 1-10 (a vision of justice and peace)

Romans 15: 4-13 (the fulfillment of hope and promise)

Matt 3: 1-12 (the time has drawn near)

Psalm 72: 1-7, 18-19 (guidance and support prayers)

theme hymn: *On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry*

The theme hymns listed with the lectionary reading lists are found in our Pilgrim hymnal and/or the Hymn folders and are listed here only as lyrical illustrations of the week's scripture selections, so readers may carry the theme in tune form throughout their week!

Sunday School News



October was a month of Moses and learning about how great and powerful God can be! God not only saved a baby's life and spoke from a burning bush, he was able to convince the mean Pharaoh to set the Israelites free.

The children also had the opportunity to dress up in their Halloween costumes on the last Sunday of the month and participate in a song ("I Sing a Song of the Saints of God") with the rest of the congregation. The costumes were great!



And as always, the children lead the congregation in the Lord's Prayer

We are still looking for anyone interested in helping out with Sunday school. Please let Angela Colbeth know at colbethangela@gmail.com if you are interested.

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!

A Re-Dedication Service for a 25 year old church building!

In these Green Mountains of Vermont, dozens of Congregational Churches dot the landscape. Some are the only church in town, sometimes just one church among several. These churches celebrate anniversaries of their buildings - 100 years - 125 years - 150 - 200 - 200+! Some buildings are newer - built after fires or unions with other congregations.

But one of our church buildings is just 25 years old. Last Sunday afternoon, past and present members, past and present pastors, Champlain Association representatives and others gathered to celebrate the Malletts Bay Congregational Church United Church of Christ!



The congregation itself is a bit older. First they worshipped at Roller Skating Rink gathered under the flickering light of the Disco Ball! Then they moved to the school gymnasium to worship - as they began to raise funds to buy land and building a meeting. Perhaps the greatest miracle of all was that they actually built a building that pleased everyone! Any congregation who has tried to change the color of the paint in the parlor - or considered changing the placement of the organ would agree.

The man who built the oak pulpit, communion table and baptismal font was there. The man who 25 years ago was the first to break ground as a child was there. Hal Harrison remembered the vision the Conference had for founding a new church on the other side of the interstate. Some of us remembered the fund raising many of the other churches in the Conference did to help make the birth of this church a reality. Paula Gile recalled how this congregation recognized her call to ministry long before she did. Jim MacIntyre traveled from Virginia to recall the joys and concerns of growing pains along the way. Mary Nelson told the story of making decisions - not out of necessity - but re-framed in light of how the ministry of the church would be enhanced - and the solution might look very different.

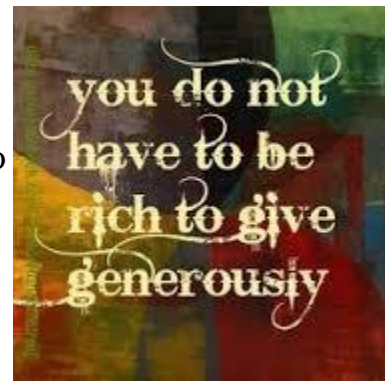
As parishioners shared some of their memories, Mary Lou DeCosta told of the sweat equity built into this sacred space. To save money, they gathered for workdays to do anything at all that they could do.

At the end of the day, her three year old son's job was to go around picking up nails that had been dropped and put them into a pail to be used the next time. Good stewardship of resources from the beginning! One day, he found a nickel among the dropped nails. Mary Lou told of his holding on to that nickel for weeks - pondering what to spend it on. One work day as they were installing the platform that would hold the pulpit and communion table - the boy found a crack in the plywood - and he dropped his nickel into the crack.

Mary Lou asked - 'why did you do that? You can't get it back!'

And her son said, 'Now this church will never have to go broke. They will always have money!'

And a little child shall lead us all into a theology of abundance - not scarcity!



May God bless those who will continue to worship in this sacred space. May they continue to find joy and comfort under this roof. And may God's Spirit dwell in their hearts and in this Holy Place called the Malletts Bay Congregational Church United Church of Christ. And let the people say - AMEN!

In peace,
Pam Lucas, VT Conference UCC

Inter Church Council

It is time once again for the area churches to start collecting the food items for the Community Thanksgiving Baskets. Started more than 40 years ago this ecumenical effort has flourished and now includes families from the wider community. More than 100 people get to enjoy a full Thanksgiving meal with all the trimmings thanks to the generosity of the member churches' congregations.

These baskets will be given to a family not able to provide a Thanksgiving dinner for their families. If you know of anyone who might like to receive one of these

baskets, please contact Storme Odell or Holly Young after church.



Our church will be collecting canned cranberry sauce (jelly) and canned turkey gravy.



Please bring them in anytime before November 20th. The food basket is in the entry of the church.

Thank you all for helping those in need.

Update from the Search Committee

The Pastoral Search Committee was formed by the Church Council in January and except for time during the summer when vacations delayed meetings, we have been working hard surveying the congregation for what will be on our Profile.

On April 21, 2016 a meeting was held to discuss and determine whether the search committee should proceed with seeking a full-time, part-time, two-thirds or three-quarters pastor. In addition to the search committee members and Rev. Kinder, there were 12 church members in attendance.

We discussed what it means to have a part-time, two-thirds or three-quarters pastor compared to a full-time one. What we are doing now without a full-time pastor, what we could continue to do (such as our amazing mission work; helping those in need; growing our Sunday School, etc.) and what we might give up if we aren't able to support a full-time pastor. We also discussed what our financial picture looks like and based on our current membership and pledges how long we might be able to support a new pastor. It was also brought to our attention that we aren't the only ones seeking a settled pastor; there are 41 churches in Vermont looking as well! At the end of the meeting, members voted to seek a two-thirds pastor.

Since then, we have reviewed the surveys, determined what further information we needed and held three small group gatherings to help us to complete our Church Profile. We obtained very valuable information from those and believe that we have a good understanding of what our congregation is looking for in a Pastor. We would like to thank everyone who attended and shared their thoughts.



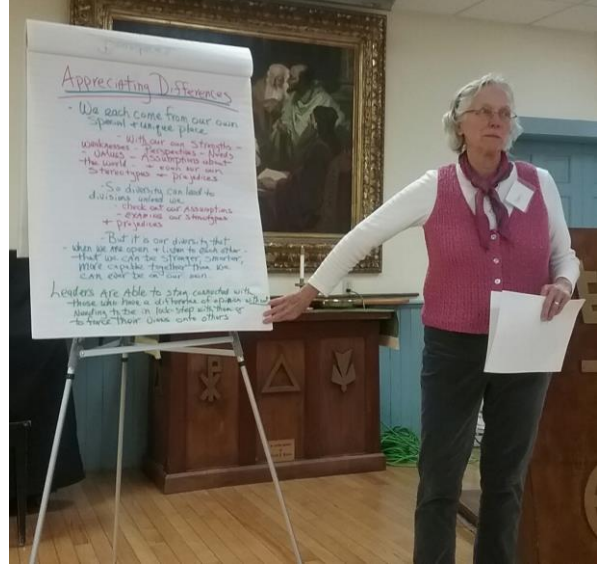
We have heard many comments about how this process seems to be taking so long and why is that? This committee is working hard to complete a Profile that prospective pastors would look at and say “this church is the one for me.” We are hoping that if we submit a Profile that is thoughtful and complete we will receive many candidates to choose from.

We have also heard comments about the ONA (Open and Affirming) process. You

should know that our committee is not holding up the Profile process because of this. The Open & Affirming process is a Diaconate initiative.

Our next meeting will be to start compiling all the information that we have received and complete the Profile. It is unclear how long this will take but we are as anxious as you to get our work done and share with the world all the good things that are happening at the Bradford Congregational Church - United Church of Christ. We know that with God's guidance the right candidates will apply and want to be a part of our congregation and community.

On October 29th we gathered for the 3rd Beloved Community and Healthy Communication workshop with Nancy Brown.



The focus was on becoming, developing, and being more effective church leaders.



Our attendees once again came from many churches and Associations, representatives ranging from lay leaders to clergy, from High School grads to post-doctoral fellows.



Leaders functioning during a time of change was an important portion, especially the realization that change is always underway and our role is to prepare for it well, by being responsive instead of reactive, by listening carefully and with understanding. We learned the role of leaders in difficult times and how to be a non-anxious presence while working to re-establish healthy communication.

For those who came ... thank you! For those who missed but would like to come another time, please let us know!
The Diaconate

