

# EPISTLE

May, 2017



**Bradford Congregational Church – UCC  
An Open & Affirming Congregation!**

**Bradford, VT (802) 222-4034**

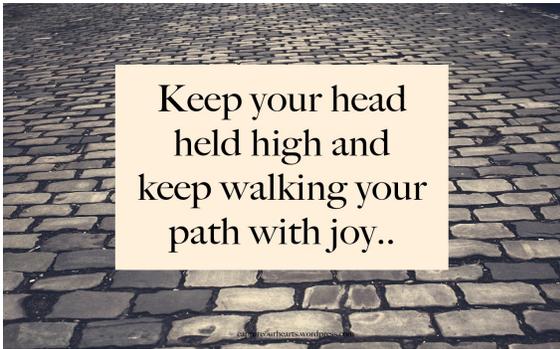
Our website: <http://bradforducc.org>  
email us at: [bradfordvtucc@gmail.com](mailto:bradfordvtucc@gmail.com)  
see us on Facebook: **Bradford Congregational Church**

Dear Church Family,



Interim pastors learn in their training that they begin preparing to leave a church the day they arrive. We are in the final phase of our wilderness journey together as the Pastoral Search Committee posts the church profile, although like the children of Israel we have no idea exactly when we will cross over into the Promised Land.

We are living in God's time, on God's schedule. Somewhere out there is just the person to be your next settled pastor, who right now is gaining just the experience you need your pastor to have, and who may be hearing the first whisper of the Spirit's calling in this direction. A month, three months, a year...we have no idea when that person's profile will arrive in the Search Committee's hands, all we



know is that the day is coming, and we will continue to prepare the congregation to cross that River Jordan with joy.

We do not know what God has in store for me, either. Somewhere out there sooner or later is my next calling. It could come anytime. I have been with

you for two and a half years now, which is a full interim span and then some. We have worked hard together and accomplished an extraordinary amount:

1. You have developed a clear and compelling sense of your identity and aspirations.
2. You have become a leader among churches in Vermont and New Hampshire in Healthy Communication and Beloved Community—not only among the many congregations that attended your workshops, but also among the many more congregations that have heard about your work and requested your Communication Guidelines and Healthy Communication Manual as a model for their churches.
3. You have become Open and Affirming in a process that used your new healthy communication skills and way of being, characterized by carefulness, respect, honesty, openness, consideration, inclusiveness and safety, with the result that the congregation emerged from this controversial issue stronger and closer, a more beloved community.
4. Your Pastoral Search Committee has come up with an honest, inviting profile that does justice to the extraordinary congregation that you are. I have done all I can do to help that process—once candidate profiles arrive I can no longer be involved for reasons of confidentiality.

I feel that you are ready to cross over into the Promised Land! In the meantime, it continues to be an honor and joy to serve here. I look forward to working with you to deepen and strengthen all we have begun until either you call a pastor or another church calls me.

I started preparing to leave the day I arrived as I was trained to do, and that has kept my entire focus on helping you make this journey, both for your sake and for the sake of the next settled pastor. However, it has not made the idea of leaving any easier.

Interim times are long enough for a pastor to fall in love with a congregation so deeply that the goodbye comes as a wound. You and I have gone through a wilderness together that has been intensely emotional at times, from the deep grief and pain you were in when I first arrived, to the arduous and long labor to bring the Identity and Aspiration Statement to birth, to the excitement and challenge of the Healthy Communication and Beloved Community workshops and practices, to the surprising—and deeply moving—sojourn down the path to become Open and Affirming.

Along the way, we also studied the wilderness journey of the American Civil Rights movement, and the journey to forgiveness and reconciliation of post-apartheid South Africa. We helped kids in India and refugees around the world. We kept the cherished traditions of the congregation alive including the Wild Game Supper and Palm Sunday Choir Festival, we have improved the condition of this beautiful building, we have held the finances steady, we have had diverse, wonderful music and many memorable moments in worship. We have kept shining in many ways as a lighted window into the world around us.

We have shared much laughter, like the time Dan Perry danced down the aisle taking the offering, or countless times when the children have made us laugh with joy, and we have shed tears together, moved by particularly poignant joys and concerns or by the beauty of the candlelight while singing Silent Night on Christmas Eve. One of the biggest sources of celebration and gratitude has been the vitality of the Sunday School and the love the children are developing for the church as they light the candles and lead the Lord's Prayer and participate upstairs and down.

We have been through much together, and I have had the opportunity to get to know you well as a congregation, and to admire you, and to love you. The next pastor will be so blessed to serve you. I feel so grateful.



Now here we are, in the last stage of the journey, and I am excited to see what more we can do in the unknown amount of time that remains. We have put in place some major foundation stones that will support your future. We may have time to lay a course or two on them before I go.

Specifically, I would like to help you:  
increase your skill using the Healthy Communication Manual;  
find ways to move your Identity and

Aspiration Statement goals forward in each area;  
explore with you the last item of the Open and Affirming Implementation Plan, which involves “seeking ways to incorporate the spirit of our Open and Affirming covenant in our church life, including worship, mission, outreach and education.”

Thank you so much for all you are and all you do. I look forward to watching you continue to grow as a congregation in the time ahead!

Peace, joy and love,  
Tom



# **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, 2017

Dear Members and Friends:

The 206th Annual Meeting of the Congregational Church of the United Church of Christ, Bradford, Vermont, will convene on Thursday, May 18, 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 MINUTES OF 2016 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 2017-2018.
2. Proposed Budget - 2017-2018
3. Shall we amend the By-laws under Article V- Boards-Section 1-Diaconate letter B (pg. 7&8) to be revised to say in the penultimate sentence, ‘It shall make an annual survey each fall of the Church roll with the Clerk and Assistant Treasurer and make necessary revisions (from active to inactive or any other changes necessary’.
4. Other business

### **ADJOURN**

### **CLOSING PRAYER**

Sincerely,

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



Prayer requests may be emailed  
to  
our prayer group

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

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

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*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.*



## ***Sunday school news***

Please come and celebrate the children of our congregation at our annual Children's Sunday service on Sunday, May 21st at 10am. The children will participate in various aspects of the service including ushering, singing & scripture reading. It will be very entertaining!

As we go into the summer months, the Christian Education committee struggles with how to continue weekly lessons to keep the children engaged all year long without burning out our current teachers. If there is anyone in the congregation that would be willing to teach one Sunday during the summer, please see Angela Colbeth.

Thank you for your continuing support and love for the children. They are the future of our church.



***Update: several wonderful folks in the church have signed on to help this summer for one Sunday, but a few more are needed ... can you be one? We're all in this together to light their way.***

## From the Vermont Conference



**The Department of Mission** thanks all those congregations and individuals who have contributed to the United Church of Christ's Neighbors in Need Programs over the years.

In the past, Neighbors in Need has funded at least two organizations in Vermont, the Dismas House in Burlington and Vermont Low Income Advocacy.

The Department would like to call to your attention changes that are being made in the NIN grant making process. From now on, all grants will be made only to UCC churches or organizations. The maximum grant will increase from \$3,000 to \$5,000. Additionally, NIN will fund five Grass Top Grants up to \$10,000 for innovative ideas to advance justice in our communities.

The Department will like to encourage Vermont Conference churches to apply for grants that will further their justice ministries in their communities. If you have an especially innovative idea that would benefit from a larger grant, please consider applying for a Grass Top Grant. Deadlines will be in the fall. For more information, go to: [http://www.ucc.org/nin\\_grant-application](http://www.ucc.org/nin_grant-application)

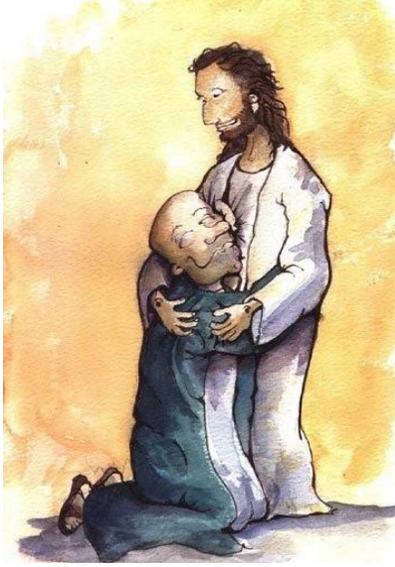
Thanks.  
Jeanne Zammataro  
Vice-chair, DOM

## **Here's to the Doubters!**

The Lectionary (which many of our churches follow) is a three year cycle of biblical exploration, following the themes of the church year, and seeking to put together a Hebrew Scripture, Psalm, Epistle and Gospel reading that seem to fit each other.

In the midst of all this diversity, Easter 2 (the Sunday after Easter) in the Lectionary is always John 20:19-31, the story of so called "Doubting" Thomas. Poor guy. We know he was a dedicated zealot who followed this interesting and unorthodox rabbi

around the countryside, thinking perhaps this was the Messiah, the one who would lead a revolt to remove the Roman occupiers from their land. Thomas was the disciple who, when Jesus turned his face toward Jerusalem, said to the other disciples, "Come along. We might as well die with him."



In John's Gospel, Jesus visits the disciples (minus Thomas) that Easter evening and shows them his hands and side, and they believe and are filled with joy. When they tell Thomas what they saw, he made his famous assertion "Unless I see the nail marks on his hands..." Eight days later, with Thomas in attendance, Jesus appears again.

What is Jesus' reaction to Thomas? Does he scold him, mock him, or berate him? No, none of these. He simply, and lovingly, gives Thomas what he needs. No "You're fired, Thomas!" or "You're off the team Thomas!" And yet Thomas is labeled Doubting Thomas, even though all he asked for was the exact thing all the other disciples wanted and needed and received in order to believe. They certainly didn't take the word of Mary Magdalene.

The further I travel on my Christian walk, the more I understand how little I actually know. And I'm ok with that. What I do know is that Jesus does not judge my uncertainty, and embraces me in the midst of my doubts, trying to give me what I need. And I despair a bit for those who have all the answers. Because that seems to leave little room for epiphanies and growth. A static faith seems a dead one to me.

So, thank you Thomas! Thank you for being the disciple who shows us that we don't have to pretend to have all the answers. Thank you for being the disciple who Jesus uses to tell all of us that we aren't to be shunned for being uncertain. Thank you for letting me know I am good company. And thank you Jesus.

Peace,  
Jim

Rev Jim Thomas

ACM, Vermont Conference

## Lectionary Readings May (Year A)



### May 7 - 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

Acts 2:42-47 (redistributing wealth according to need)

1 Peter 2:19-25 (He gave His life for all lost sheep)

John 10:1-10 (He is the gate and the voice)

Psalm 23 (He is the good shepherd)

theme hymn: *Savior, Like a Shepherd, Lead Us*

### May 14 - 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

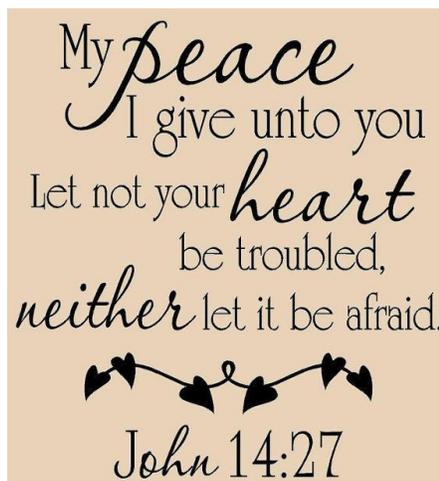
Acts 7: 55-60 (Stephen was faithful to the end)

1 Peter 2: 2-10 (we're called to witness God's revealed mercy)

John 14: 1-14 (the way to the Father)

Psalm 31: 1-5, 15-16 (the Lord is our rock, our refuge)

theme hymn: *Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation*



## May 21- 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

Acts 17: 22-31 (know God through Jesus Christ)

1 Peter 3: 13-22 (maintain your relationship with God)

John 14: 15-21 (live His teachings in our relationships)

Psalm 66: 8-20 (God listens!)

theme hymn: *Love Divine, All Loves Excelling*



## May 28 - 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

Acts 1: 6-14 (our ministry is here and now)

1 Peter 4: 12-14; 5:6-11 (be firm in our faith)

John 17: 1-11 (we must be unified and faithful)

Psalm 68: 1-10, 32-35 (be jubilant with joy)

theme hymn: *All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name*

## June 4 - Pentecost

Acts 2: 1-21 (while I have your attention, let me tell you ...)

1 Corinthians 12: 3b-13 (each with different gifts from the same Spirit)

John 20: 19-23 (Peace ... Joy)

Psalm 104: 24-34, 35b (all God's works are manifold)

theme hymn: *Come, Holy Spirit, Heavenly Dove*

***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!***

# GO PAPERLESS

If you would like to go paperless and be on the email-only list for this monthly Epistle, simply notify [Barb Joslyn](#).

Your planet thanks you!

Happiness is the Community Supper!



## A time of Community



## A time of Discovery



**We now have baskets at both entrances for food donations. All your wonderful donations are given to the Food Shelf at the Bradford Academy.**

**Currently the emphasis is on hearty soups, but they can always use canned meats and dinners, as well as sundries of toothpaste, toothbrushes, paper towels, diapers, baby wipes, shampoo.**



**Dear older church family members,**

The Bradford Senior Center would like to know if you are interested in participating in a fun and beneficial program at the Bradford Elementary School this coming Thursday, May 4th. According to Ginny Crowe in church today, you are invited to come to the school at 10:00 AM to read aloud to the children, and then to stay and have lunch with them.

If you are interested, please let the Senior Center know at 222-4782.



**Guess who made all the refreshments for April 30<sup>th</sup> Fellowship time!**

**Scones  
Donuts  
Juice  
Coffee  
Tea**

**And a DELICIOUS time was had by all the grownups  
who were so grateful  
for this energetic and loving group of kids**