

EPISTLE

June, 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
see us on Facebook: **Bradford Congregational Church**

Dear Church Family,

I hope that you have seen the letter that I sent out at the end of May announcing my departure. My last Sunday will be July 2nd.

This congregation has accomplished an extraordinary amount over the past two and a half years, as I described in last month's Epistle, and it has been transformed. You have carried forward your cherished traditions and historic character while the culture and feeling of the congregation have changed in positive ways. Your accomplishments and transformations are marvels for which I am deeply grateful.

I have only one concern about them. My concern is that after I am gone someone might say, "Tom did that," or "Tom made that happen." If you ever hear such a remark, please be quick to disagree vociferously (in a healthy, respectful way).

All the good things that have come into being here were inspired, chosen and accomplished by you. I was only your helper, and only on some of them.

The Diaconate and I circulated a questionnaire and held a series of small group gatherings in the fall of 2014. We recorded and organized the responses and issued

a Summary Report described at the time in this way: “It reflects the voice of the congregation speaking about what it most appreciates and values in itself as it has been, and what it longs to see itself become, and also what it likes least, and what it has felt disappointed, angry or sad about, and what it feels is most important to change now.” It was your voice, or I would say the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking through this congregation, that this report summarized.

The Church Council appointed a Steering Committee that led the congregation through a careful process of translating the responses into an Identity and Aspiration Statement that reflected what the collective voice of the congregation had said. That Statement was adopted at a congregational meeting on July 19, 2015. Your input shaped it entirely, your feedback to the Steering Committee’s wordsmithing refined it and you gave it your unanimous support.

You did it! Not Tom!

One aspect that the Identity and Aspiration Statement could not convey was the sense of urgency that you felt about a long pattern of unhealthy communication. The Summary Report said, “It is clear that the biggest dislike, source of wounds and priority for change are about the way people treat one another, especially when there are conflicts over change or clergy issues.” This clear mandate to change the culture of the church came from you and the Spirit speaking through you.

The Diaconate responded by holding four Healthy Communication and Beloved Community workshops. Many people from our congregation attended them. The Church Council adopted the resulting Healthy Communication Manual for use by Committees, Boards, the Council and Congregation. Since then, time and again a disagreement, misunderstanding or controversy that could have been a “source of wounds” has been discussed in a healthy way that has made us feel closer and stronger as a congregation. We have seen this work in meetings of the Diaconate, Board of Mission and Social Action, Pastoral Search Committee and Church Council, as well as in Open and Affirming conversations. We are still learning, but already it feels miraculous.

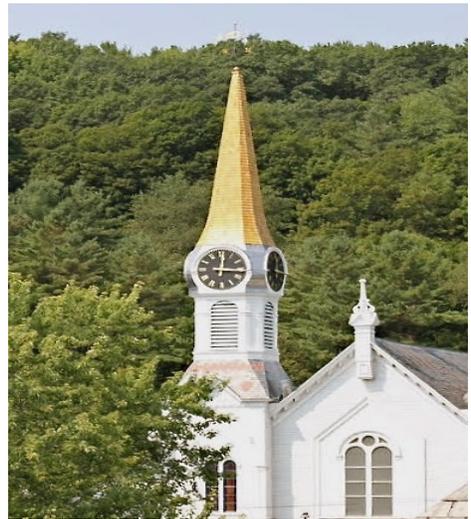
You did it! The Bradford Congregational Church has become known as a leader in the Vermont Conference of the UCC in this. Your work has inspired and been incorporated by many churches, both the dozen or so that attended the workshops

that you organized and others who have seen your Healthy Communication Manual. All this was your doing!

In early 2016 the Search Committee conducted a survey and found that three-quarters of the respondents were interested in exploring being an Open and Affirming (ONA) congregation of the UCC. It was consistent with your Identity and Aspiration Statement, yet also surprising to find just how committed you were because some groups covered by ONA remain controversial in many congregations. The Search Committee unanimously asked the Diaconate to consider a process to explore becoming ONA, and the Diaconate unanimously agreed. A large portion of the congregation participated in the many meetings along the way. In the end, you voted by roughly the same percentage, three-quarters, to adopt an Open and Affirming covenant.

You did this from start to finish!

The church is transformed from what it was two and a half years ago, and you have done it. You have a revitalized Board of Mission and Social Action leading you to meaningful actions. You have an outstanding children's program serving more children. You are learning how to be increasingly welcoming, loving and helpful, and the celebratory atmosphere during refreshments reflects that. Relationships strained by the unhealthy patterns of the past have found forgiveness and reconciliation. The Church Council recognized that the congregation was not ready to start a Pastoral Search until the end of the first year of the interim. Now you have an outstanding profile posted by a superb committee. The church building has been lovingly tended, the steeple and clock now gleam over the town, and a fresh coat of paint is coming.



You did it all! I dedicated myself to supporting what you indicated you wanted to do, I contributed my gifts and skills, I served as cheerleader and midwife and adviser on the process, but you transformed the church yourselves.

This is important for you to realize as you approach this next stage of your wilderness journey. You have the maps, leadership and skills you need to cross over into the Promised Land.

This will still be true when the new pastor arrives. You will continue to be the ones who hear your calling and envision your fulfillment of it and do the work to accomplish it. A settled pastor will join as one of you, yet when the pastor leaves, you will again look back on the accomplishments and say, we did that. You have proven that you can do what the Spirit asks.

Thank you so much for letting me walk this part of your journey with you. It has been a tremendous gift and an honor. You have taught and inspired me. Thank you.

Peace, joy and love,
Tom





Prayer requests may be emailed
to
our prayer group

**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.*



Diaconate News

Please save these dates!

June 18th ... our morning worship will be led musically by the Father/Son toe-tapping Gospel duo of Bruce and Caleb Freeberg. This Family Worship service will be one that gets you a-humming for the rest of the day, we guarantee it!



And please do plan to join us afterwards in the vestry for a very special time of sweet celebration for Rev. Kinder with his biggest fans, the children of our Sunday School!

June 25th ... filling the pulpit will be our Conference Associate Minister Pam Lucas, always such a treat in itself.



July 2nd ... Rev. Kinder's last Sunday in our pulpit.

Please plan to share Communion with him and your church family, followed by an

All-church Godspeed Potluck Luncheon

Sunday school news

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.

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.



June 4th is Oxbow High School's Baccalaureate, this year in our church.



Board of Mission & Social Action: BMSA



On Mother's Day, the Board of Missions and Social Action was thrilled to welcome Catherine Kidder to the pulpit for a mission moment. Catherine sits on the board of Help-Kids-India. She spoke of two remarkable Indian women who work tirelessly to keep the work of their three creche projects going. Women and young children from the poverty stricken southern tip of India attend programs at a creche that provide safety, nutrition, hygiene, health care and education.

Creche children are finishing school at a higher rate, finding better employment, and are better at taking care of their own families as they reach adulthood. Our own dear Lora Chatfield helped begin the health care portion of the creche work when she lived there for a year. And our former minister, P.V. George feels so strongly about HKI's mission that he sent a very generous donation through our BMSA with a warm Mother's Day greeting to all at Bradford Congregational Church. If you are interested in sending a donation to this wonderful work please send it to: Help Kids India, PO Box 1022, East Corinth, VT 05040.



The BMSA is reading the book *Beyond The Beautiful Forever* by Katherine Boo which chronicles life, death and hope in a Mumbai Undercity. We are having another **book group brunch on Saturday, June 17 at 10:00**. Please let Holly Young know if you would like to borrow a book and join us.

June 4 is the Strengthen the Church Mission Offering. Strengthen the Church is a special mission offering to re-imagine and build the future of the UCC. This offering supports youth ministries and full-time leaders for new churches. This collection also helps churches get involved with refugee resettlement and work with immigrants.

From the Vermont Conference



Generational Stewardship

Working with churches from all over the Conference, I get to see firsthand how our polity informs (or, rather, doesn't inform) how we do basic bedrock functions such as governance or stewardship. So many differences. What is also interesting is the way in which some things are consistent no matter how we organize ourselves.

I'm thinking about stewardship in particular. One of the areas of congregational life that is undergoing a significant change is how we 'do' Stewardship, from annual pledge drives to capital campaigns and planned giving. I attended a workshop titled "Generational Differences in Stewardship Development," led by Rev. Susan Snook, Church Planter for the Episcopal Church. She made the point very well that how we do Stewardship for the younger generations (later baby Boomers, Gen Xers, Millennials) has to be different than the way we're used to. You cannot use the same voice to speak to all and expect all to hear. The GI/Silent/"Greatest" generations, particularly after World War II, valued strong institutions. They dove in and participated and financially supported for reasons such as:

- **To meet societal expectations**
- **For Institution building, teamwork, or responsibility**
- **To pay their fair share**
- **Or to leave a legacy**

When doing stewardship with younger generations, asking them to "fulfill their obligation" is not going to find a receptive audience. What other things do we know about them?

- **They are hard working and have complex schedules. (as do their kids)**
- **Their time is often more precious than money.**
- **They need to understand the congregation's vision, not the budget. They value transparency - over half will not connect to an organization unless they feel a personal connection or trust in leadership.**

- **They are reluctant to commit; more likely to take part in "Micro-Volunteering" than a multi-year commitment to a committee. But they do volunteer: in a 2010 survey, 79% of Millennials volunteered for organizations.**
- **They are focused on mission: helping the poor, caring for the environment, and enrichment for their children. They value outreach and tangible results. 85% of Millennials said they are motivated to give by a compelling mission or cause.**

If your congregation mostly exists to worship on Sunday and share fellowship, it's not going to be very attractive to younger generations. If, instead, your congregation exists to serve - then you have a missional focus that will connect with them and be valued. And that value will express itself in participation and financial support.

Let me say it this way: if you speak with one voice to multiple generations, at least some of them will not hear you. The irony is that despite being perhaps the best positioned mainline denomination (in terms of polity and theology) to connect with Millennials, we do so poorly, because we speak to them as though they are their grandparents.

And really, I'm not just talking about stewardship anymore. But I'll bet you knew that.

One last thing: If the only way to make a financial contribution on Sunday morning is by a plate being passed around, you really shouldn't expect Millennials to give. Most of them don't carry much cash or a checkbook. There is no better reason for promoting electronic giving (including a QR code in your bulletin) than that.



Peace,
Jim

Rev. Jim Thomas
Associate Conference Minister for
Stewardship, Church Vitality and Finance

Lectionary Readings June (Year A)



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*

June 11

Genesis 1:1 - 2:4a (when God speaks, action occurs)
2 Cor 13:11-13 (pastoral charges to the faith community)
Matthew 28:16-20 (make disciples of all nations)
Psalm 8 (how majestic is your name)
theme hymn: *I Sing the Mighty Power of God*

June 18

Genesis 18:1-15 (3 strangers visit Abraham)
Romans 5:1-8 (God's love for us is incredible)
Matthew 9:35 - 10:8 (he commissions his 12 with his authority)
Psalm 116: 1-2, 12-19 (O Lord, I am your servant)
theme hymn: *Come, Labor On*

June 25

Genesis 21: 8-21 (Hagar and Ishmael survive)
Romans 6:1-11 (we have a new life in Christ)
Matthew 10: 24-39 (you are under God's care)
Psalm 86: 1-10, 16-17 (Give ear to my prayer)
theme hymn: *Great Is Thy Faithfulness*

July 2

Genesis 22:1-14 (God tests Abraham)

Romans 6:12-23 (God freely grants eternal life)

Matthew 10: 40-42 (who receives Christ's reps. Receives Christ)

Psalm 13 (I will sing to the Lord) theme hymn: There's a Spirit in the Air

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!





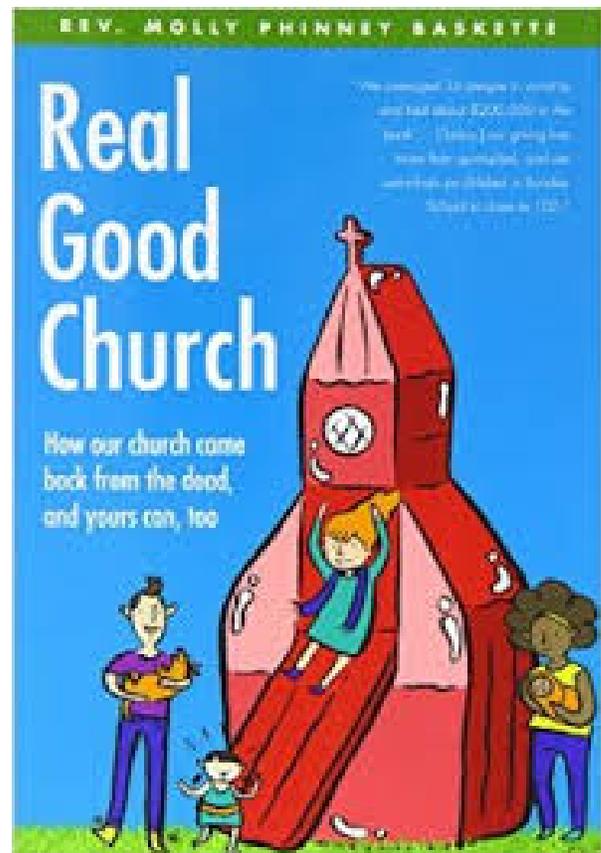
If you would like to go paperless and be on the email-only list for this monthly Epistle, simply notify [Barb Joslyn](#).

Your planet thanks you!
(And our budget thanks you!!)

Do you have one of the copies of this book,
Real Good Church?

PLEASE return it to Ginny Moore for the Church library, or merely drop it off on top of the bookcase in the vestry.

All of the copies belonging to the church are out!





Happiness is the Community Supper!

Every 4th Wednesday



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.



Anyone for Mahjong?

I am trying to find out if there is anyone who would have an interest in learning how to play MAHJONG. I do not know how to play and would have to engage a teacher if there is enough interest. Here's a brief description:

MAHJONG is a game of skill coupled with wit and fortune. It originated in China, and dates far back into ancient timesabout two thousand years ago, through many dynasties. This game became the emperor's palace game since the Ming dynasty. The game is played with tiles and dice.

Contact information: Peggy Blanchard
802peg@gmail.com or 802.222.4088



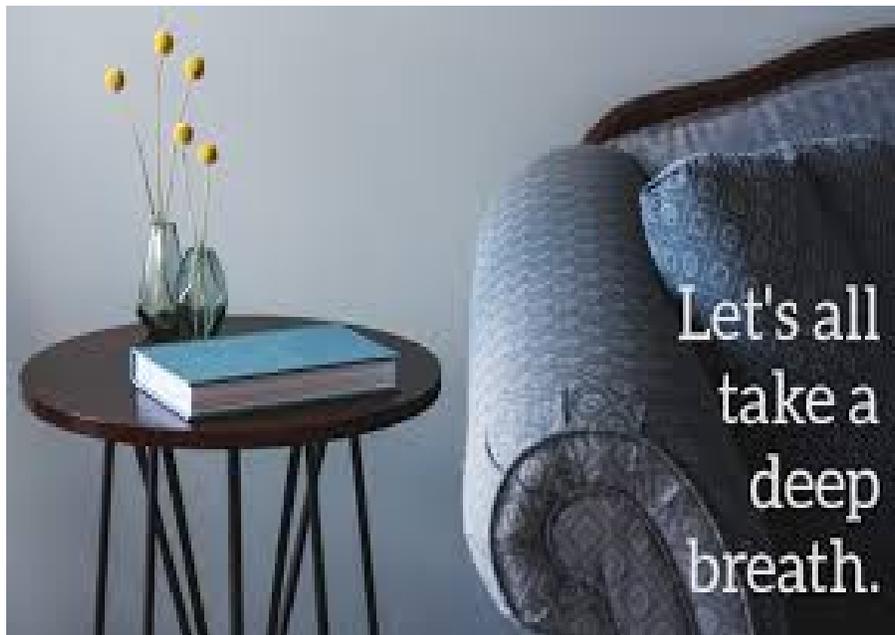
Children's Sunday 2017



The teachers were thanked for their year-round dedication and service

Every child read flawlessly and without hesitation





***“March went out like a lion
A-whippin' up the water in the bay;
Then April cried and stepped aside,
And along came pretty little May!
May was full of promises
But she didn't keep 'em quick enough for some
And the crowd of doubtin' Thomases
Was predictin' that the summer'd never come***

***But it's comin' by gum,
We can feel it come,
You can feel it in your heart
You can see it in the ground
You can see it in the trees
You can smell it in the breeze
Look around! Look around! Look around!***