

EPISTLE

July, 2017



Bradford Congregational Church – UCC
An Open & Affirming Congregation!
Bradford, VT (802) 222-4034

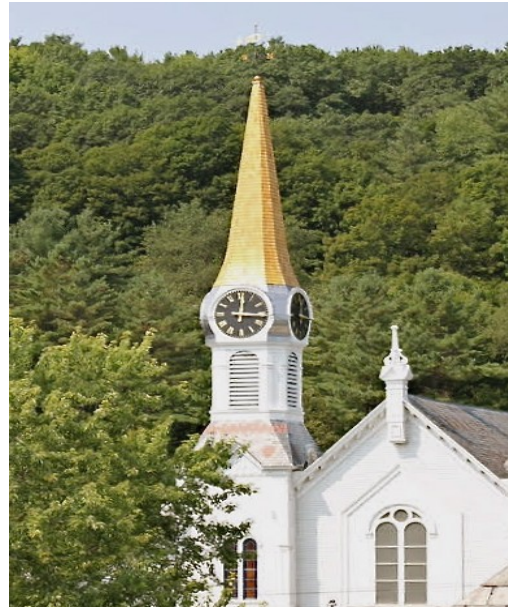
Our website: <http://bradforducc.org>
email us at: bradfordvtucc@gmail.com
see us on Facebook: **Bradford Congregational Church**

Dear Church Family,

This is my last letter to you. That makes me sad. I have loved serving here—loved the people, the sanctuary and building, and loved the Spirit as it has moved through you in this amazing time of healing, renewal and change. I wish I could spend many more years with you, but that has never been a possibility since I signed the pledge in my initial covenant promising that I would not seek to be your settled pastor. I have stayed almost three years, which is a year longer than I thought I would, and I am so grateful for that extra time! I came to do the job of an interim, and part of that job is to leave before our hearts would have me leave.

Another part of the job is to send you off into the future along the path that we have discerned together, the path that leads to what God is calling you to be and do. I think of the scene in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* when Gandalf has led Bilbo and the Dwarves to the edge of the dark forest of Mirkwood. They are standing where the path enters that unknown future of opportunity and danger, the path they know they need to take to fulfill their purpose in life. They are distressed that Gandalf is not traveling it with them. They hear him call his final wisdom as he rides off: "Don't leave the path!"

My most important message to you is, “Don’t leave the path!” Don’t leave the path of your Identity and Aspiration Statement. Don’t leave the path of your Healthy Communication Guidelines and Manual. Don’t leave the path of your Open and Affirming Covenant. Don’t leave the path of your general Covenant. Stay on the path described by those four maps, and keep returning to them on a regular basis to keep their vision fresh in your minds and in the minds of those who join you along the way. Ask yourselves regularly how you are doing at following them. Read the Communication Guidelines at the start of every committee, Board and Council meeting and spend five minutes talking about it.



Don’t leave that path, please! It is the Spirit’s path through the wilderness. It is Christ’s way that he is calling you to follow. It is the path you yourselves identified and elected to follow.

My number two message is, do not despair when the path proves hard to follow. Bilbo and the dwarves did well until they despaired. Even when their doubt made them stray, though, they still came back around to their path. You may stray, but if you turn yourself back to those roadmaps, it will come out all right, whatever trouble or delay may result. Despair is the only thing that can keep you from returning to the path, so keep the faith! Pray! Live by metanoia! Turn your heart, mind, soul and steps back to the sacred way in each moment, and trust that the Spirit will respond to your openness by leading and empowering you, as your covenant says.

Please keep in mind that you are strong as a congregation. You have an exceptional group of lay leaders with experience in every aspect of church life and mission. You have been through hard times and gained wisdom and strength by working through them in a healthy, open-minded way. You have a beautiful, well-maintained building and you have some money in the bank. You have children and young families! You have scriptures, music and traditions to help guide and uphold you. You are strong! Plenty strong for what the journey ahead will require.

You also have proven that you are able to change and come through change as a closer, more beloved community. This was one of your biggest concerns when I arrived—recent changes or attempts to change had torn you apart three years ago, and yet you recognized that change is inescapable. Christ calls the church to serve the world that exists, not the world of the past. Society is changing at a dizzying pace. A church must be able to change in order to follow Christ effectively and thrive. You have transformed your way of going through the challenges and disagreements that change can stir up. You can face whatever comes now with confidence in your skills of healthy communication and beloved community.

You also have proven that you can forgive and heal. These are essential because we are not perfect, and we are not all the same, and there are bound to be rough edges that sometimes cause pain. Beloved community requires being able to patch up mistakes or broken relationships. I have been deeply moved to see people reaching across old divides with lovingkindness.

The biggest area where I have a concern is in the way you relate day to day to one another and to people who are new and to people who are outside the church. I have seen new people and even established participants in the church who were left standing or sitting alone before, during and after worship. I have heard the “ouch” when people have felt they were treated carelessly or inconsiderately by church members. As a Deacon pointed out recently, your feeling that you are as friendly and welcoming as you can be actually holds you back from being as friendly and welcoming as you need to be in order to grow in numbers.

The solutions to this are simple. They are first, to be mindful of every person as someone in need of your lovingkindness, especially those who seem different or alone or neglected, and second, to be careful in every single interaction you have with anyone anywhere.

The Communication Guidelines say among other things, “I will...

- Pray for guidance, patience and understanding before **all** interactions, communication, or meetings.
- Carefully consider the impact of my words, in oral, written, or electronic form.

We need to remember that every interaction and communication with another person is an opportunity to do ministry. We bear witness to a God who is love when we treat others lovingly. It is not enough that the sanctuary and music are beautiful, and it doesn't matter how dynamic your pastor is, people need to feel loved and cared for and safe, they need to pick up on the positivity of the church culture in order to stay.

This is a challenge for congregations, so the UCC has developed materials to help. Here is one set: <https://www.uccresources.com/products/extravagant-welcome?variant=1133881332> I hope you will take steps like these to make your every interaction more extravagantly loving and positive inside and outside of the church.

Related to this is the need to accommodate people who do not live up to what you consider to be proper church behavior, whether children or adults. There is a great story in the UCC resources about an unruly, shaggy young man in torn, dirty clothes who came into a large, conservative church in the middle of a service one Sunday. He walked forward trying to find a place to sit, but no one made room for him. Finally, he reached the front and plopped down right in the aisle in front of the pulpit.

The pastor kept talking nervously but the parishioners were distracted and tense. Then one of the ushers, a man in his 80s who was dressed in a suit and walked with a cane, came down the aisle. Everyone felt relieved that he would escort the young man out and they could turn their attention back to worship. But when the old man reached the front he dropped his cane and very carefully lowered himself down and sat with the young man in the middle of the aisle.

We all have our buttons pushed by different types of behavior, appearances or opinions. Jesus does not care—he calls us to do what he did no matter how we feel about the other person. He reached across every barrier, he welcomed, ate with and touched outcasts who made him unpopular or impure. Our task is not to change others to be like us or to force ourselves to like people who push our buttons. Our task is to find a way to treat them with love as they are. God is love, and love is a transformational force. Trust that if the person needs to change, God will work through our unconditional love to accomplish that change. The only change you need to worry about is that your heart be transformed into Christ's. Do that and everything else will take care of itself!

The Deacons asked me to reflect on what was good about this time together versus what was hard about it. I think our best times were our hardest ones. It was hard learning and talking together about forgiveness, healing and reconciliation. It was hard working slowly and deliberately to discern what became our Identity and Aspiration Statement. It was hard admitting that we did not know everything about healthy communication and beloved community and had suffered from unhealthy patterns. It was hard learning how to communicate differently and go around the circle carefully listening and speaking in turn. It was hard facing our prejudices, fears and differences in the Open and Affirming process. It was hard becoming O&A knowing that several people in the congregation were opposed to it. Yet every one of those hard times was as meaningful and moving as anything I have ever seen happen in a church.

So I hope you will continue to choose to do hard things, knowing they will probably end up being among the best things, if you do them with the same healthy, loving approach. I hope you will take risks for Christ. I hope you will let the Holy Spirit drive you as it drove him. Dare greatly!

You are an extraordinary group of people with extraordinary gifts, and this is an extraordinarily challenging time that needs everything you can give.

I will be watching from not far away, eager to see where you go from here!

Thank you so much for all you have given me. It has been such an honor to serve 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



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



Please plan to share a very personal and meaningful Communion with him and your church family, followed

by an All-church Godspeed Potluck Luncheon

These past several years have been a wonder-filled journey of self-discovery and growth for us all. No mere words can describe the path lined with joy and peace and love and listening and yes, dearly beloved community. We have struggled. We have worked. We have opened our hearts and minds to shared insights and understandings. We now, thanks to the hard work by Rev. Kinder and us all, advocate for hearing differing points of views so that we can emerge all the stronger and unified in this Body of Christ fellowship we call the Bradford Congregational Church.

On July 2nd, we will all be at a fork in the road. One path will lead towards our church's future. The other will lead towards Rev. Kinder's future. Both are well lined with paving stones of mutual love and best wishes and prayers of joy for having been a part of each others spiritual lives these past three years.

It will be an emotionally charged day, yet one bursting with smiles amid the tears. Please do come if you can to celebrate amidst this Beloved Community.

Here is the listing of those who will be filling our pulpit in July:

July 9th and July 16th will be our own Cass Poulos. She says, “I am a graduate of Andover Newton Theological School, approved for ordination pending call in the Pilgrim Association, Mass Conference, UCC. I was the intentional supply pastor at Bath Cong Church in Bath, NH. I am passionate out God who in love, continually reaches out to us. Salvation is personal and, if we pay attention to the life Jesus lived, it is also social. We must take the Gospel outside the building and make a compassionate difference in the world. ” Let's all give her the enthusiastic welcome she deserves!

July 23rd will be the Rev. Neil Wilson

July 30th will be the Rev. Elisa Lucozzi

On both the 23rd and the 30th we will be hosting a neutral pulpit for a fellow Vermont Conference church. As a covenantal church, we are sometimes asked if we can aid other churches who are seeking new pastors if we can host their search committee and a candidate pastor in what is called a neutral pulpit. This is an opportunity for that church's search committee to experience the candidate leading worship and giving a sermon. This is a wonderful opportunity to hear a voice from outside of our immediate community in the pulpit.

Since we have also just embarked on our search for a new pastor, our search committee will be asking churches for the same hospitality someday in the future. We invite our congregation to engage with the candidate pastor, but to respect the confidentiality of the search process by not seeking to learn what church s/he is a candidate for. The same would go for interactions with members of the search committee. The search committee members will also be encouraged to not divulge what church they are members of. This shows our respect for the search process and its need for confidentiality; to protect the integrity of the process is very helpful.



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?

► See the list on the table in the Sunday School area for the few remaining vacancies. We're all in this together to light their way.



[From the Vermont Conference](#)



On June 29th, our conference delegates left for Baltimore to be immersed in the 31st General Synod of the United Church of Christ. Synod is an experience like no other. It is a chance to see the UCC in all our richness and diversity, to experience powerful worship, hear outstanding speakers, be part of the process for bringing Resolutions to the floor for a vote, and take part as witnesses to the power, life and love of Jesus the Christ.

Your delegates will work hard. We caucus at 6:30 in the morning and most days do not end until 9:00 or 10:00 pm. All of our delegates have been assigned to a Committee to learn about, perhaps change some of the Resolutions submitted for this Synod. Here are just a sampling of the Resolutions that will be considered.

A More Just Economy - Living Wage and Job Creation
Resolution of Witness in Support of Adult Survivors of Child Abuse and Neglect
Towards Disability Justice - A Call to the Church and Churches
On Becoming an Immigrant Welcoming Church

In addition, an emergency resolution was submitted in response to the U.S. pulling out of the Paris Accord on Climate Change. The resolution, "The Earth is the Lord's - Not Ours to Wreck; Imperatives for a New Era" was initially submitted by the Northern California Nevada Conference at their Annual Meeting. Since that time, numerous conferences have voted to support this Resolution. By a vote of the Conference Board of Directors I'm happy to report that VTUCC is one of them.

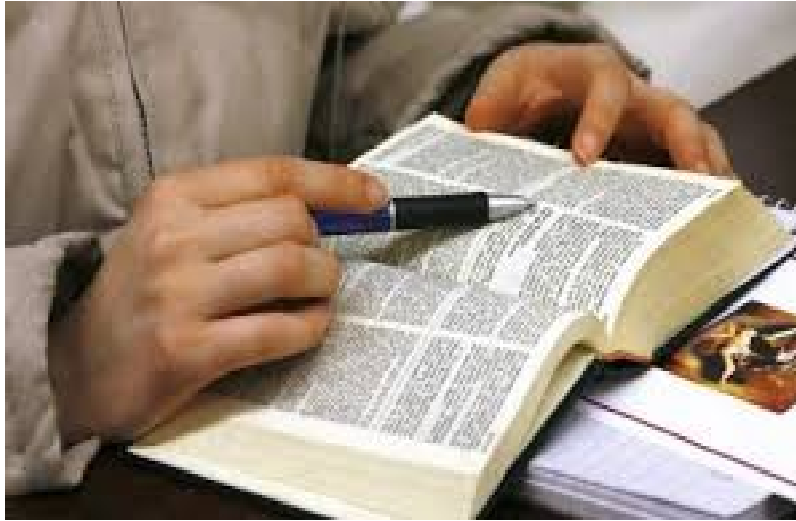
Because we are a denomination that seeks to act and witness in the moment when called for, Thursday morning will also include an emergency prayer vigil on health care at the capital and led by our General Minister and President, John Dorhauer.

You can follow General Synod at <http://synod.uccpages.org/> and your delegation through twitter hashtag #UCCGS and our conference Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/Vermont.Conference.UCC/>.

Please pray for our delegation and the whole of General Synod that we might discern the will and ways of the One we seek to follow.

In peace, Lynn

Lectionary Readings July (Year A)



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*

July 9

Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67 (Rebecca chooses Isaac)

Romans 7:15-25a (God liberates us from our bumbling messes!)

Matthew 11:16-19,25-30 (trade our yoke of law for the yoke of grace)

Psalm 45:10-17 (ode for a royal wedding)

theme hymn: *Lord Jesus, Think On Me*

July 16

Genesis 25:19-34 (struggle betwixt the last and the first)

Romans 8:1-11 (the way of the Spirit frees us)

Matthew 13:1-9,18-23 (Trust God. There will be a harvest!)

Psalm 119:105-112 (God's word is the lamp for our feet)

theme hymn: *Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise*

July 23

Genesis 28:10-19a (Jacob is on the run, but not from God's will)

Romans 8:12-25 (be confident in the hope of salvation)

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 (God will do the final weeding, not us)

Psalm 139:1-12,23-24 (O Lord, you know all there is to know about me)

theme hymn: *There's a Wideness in God's Mercy*

July 30

Genesis 29:15-28 (Jacob the con man gets conned)

Romans 8:26-39 (No one can separate us from God's love)

Matthew 13:31-33,44-52 (weeds, treasures, and nets ... it's all good)

Psalm 105:1-11,45b (seek the Lord and his strength)

theme hymn: *Rejoice, Ye Pure in Heart*

August 6

Genesis 32: 22-31 (trickster Jacob receives a new name instead)

Romans 9:1-5 (Paul mourns for his Jewish brethren)

Matthew 14:13-21 (God's grace is sufficient to feed us all)

Psalm 17:1-7,15 (Hear our just cause, O Lord)

theme hymn: *O for a Thousand Tongues*

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!!)**

Important news from Church Council ... there is no Church Council meeting in July. The August meeting will be on August 10th at 7pm.

Alzheimers and Dementia

The AD church: The Greater Hartford United Church of Christ, at 1721 Maple St. (Route 14) in Hartford Village, hosts an interdenominational worship service, created for those living with Alzheimers or dementia and their caregivers/families.

It is held the first Sunday of every month, beginning at 1:30. It features a short message, traditional hymns, the Lord's Prayer, and Communion. The service is followed by refreshments and social time.

All are welcome. 802-295-9635.



Happiness is the Community Supper!

Every 4th Wednesday ... our next will be July 25th ... see you then!



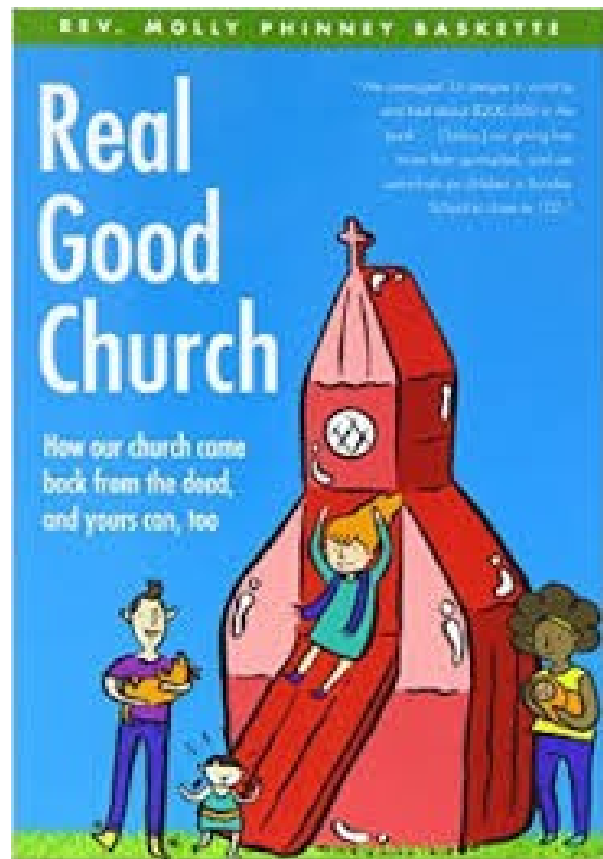
We now have baskets at both entrances for food donations. All your wonderful donations are given to the Food Shelf at the Bradford Academy.

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.

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!



ANNUAL ALL-CHURCH YARD SALE

Dear Parishioner:

We are having our all-church yard sale and it will be held in the Church Vestry again this year. Most items will be by donation.

Friday, August 25 - 9:00 am to 3:00 pm

Saturday, August 26 - 9:00 am to 12:00 pm

We are soliciting items to be delivered to the church vestry (no clothing or bedding please). Items may be brought to the church any time after August 13. The Vestry door will be open.

Items, in good condition, such as but not limited to:

| | | |
|---------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| Furniture | Knick-Knacks | Pewter |
| Books | Silver | Tools |
| Collectibles | Kitchen Items | Arts & Craft |

Co-Chairs - Dan & Marcia Perry, Eris Eastman, Vida Perry-Munson, Linda Gross, Martina Stever and Sue Eastman