



The Good Word Newsletter

Volume 18, Issue 7 December 2016

The First Congregational
Church of Natick

United Church
of Christ

An Open and Affirming
Congregation

I want to tell you about a curly-headed metaphor who graced our morning worship in New Hampshire last weekend.

But first I need to set the stage. Brookwoods is beautiful retreat center right on the edge of Lake Winnepesaukee. I felt right at home in the Adirondack chairs on the lawn that opened onto a view of the water. Mostly, we were a group of adults, but thankfully we had two youth and a toddler along to keep us from taking ourselves too seriously.

Some other time, I'll tell you about the trails through the woods and down to the lake or hiking with Sara up Mt. Major, or about morning mindfulness meditations with Kirsten, and the amazing on-site theatre, complete with popcorn for our "Friday Night at the Movies." I probably shouldn't mention the "Make Your Own Sundae Ice Cream Bar" or everyone will want to come next time. So forget I mentioned great food, OK?

Right now I just want to tell you about worship on Sunday morning in this big common space in front of a stone fireplace where our whole group gathered in a circle in comfy sofas and chairs. In the middle of the circle was the "altar" that we had made on Saturday.

On Saturday, we had taken a tablecloth, a couple of blue scarves and some large rocks from the path outside and turned a coffee table into a river running through the mountains. Each of us placed a candle in a little paper boat and then we set our boat at the place along the river that reflected where we were on our life journey.

On Saturday night, many of us placed our boats into precarious positions on the river reflecting how treacherous the times felt, or how many of the issues that we affirmed as a community of faith now seemed at risk, or just how exhausted we were from the whole ordeal of the election. Yet when all the boats were afloat on the river, the effect was not that of troubled waters but a small fleet heading out on a common mission.



On Sunday morning, our little boats welcomed us back into community. Their twinkling lights made it seem as if they were somehow bobbing in the current. All of them were still afloat.

As we sang and read from our sacred story about a God who could lift up valleys and make rough places level, our curly-headed metaphor named Finn set about telling the story in his own way. Finn thought that the rocks needed rearrangement, and as we talked and sang and prayed, he moved every single one of them into different configurations. He tried stacking and balancing. He grouped them on one end of the table and then the other. He cleared out the "rapids" in the middle of the river and with a little help from his mom even moved one particularly hefty rock to slow the waterfall down to a trickle.

It is one thing to read Scripture. It is quite another to see it and be reminded that the creating and redeeming power of God is not stuck between the covers of some musty book. It is not ancient history. It is happening all the time, right under our noses.

On the ride home from Winnepesaukee on Sunday afternoon, I checked my phone to discover the unbelievable news that there had been a hate crime in Natick just down the

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Rev. Victoria Alford Guest

OUTREACH MINISTERS

Rev. Dr. John Weagraff

STUDENT MINISTER

Tiffany Spigarolo

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Our Tree of Life



Congrats to Toby Evers and Jenn Heinen, who were married on October 20th in New York. —. Deb Evers sent us this family photo, which she titled, “Happily Evers After Wedding!”

Maya and Ella celebrated their 15th birthday with family and friends on November 5th by hosting a quinceanera. A quinceanera is a celebration of a Latina girl coming into

womanhood at the age of 15. The quinceanera dates back to 500 B.C. and was brought to the United States by immigrants from many Latin countries back in the 1960’s. The Martinez girl’s celebration began with a blessing and prayer given by Rev. Audra Teague Mackey, a crowning of the girls by their grandmothers, and “changing of the shoes” (flats to high heels) done by their Dad, followed by a father/daughter dance. In addition, Maya and Ella each had five special friends called “Damas” who helped to organize the party and perform a dance for the guests that attended.



We celebrate with Lauren Robbins who not only is our wonderful soprano soloist, but she also learned that she passed the bar in October, which is just about as cool as being able to hit those high A’s! Congratulations!



On October 16th we officially welcomed Jayme and Will Bastiansen into our fellowship. They have been attending services for a few years now. They have three children, Hailey, Liam and Meagan who are in middle

school, elementary and preschool and whose activities keep them busy. But when there is spare time they enjoy camping, watching movies, and cooking. Will enjoys working on his electric vehicle business and doing research and design. Jayme loves to go horseback riding and read. They are looking forward to getting to know everyone better.

Jill Mooney was also welcomed into our fellowship on October 16th. Jill lives in Wayland with her husband Michael and her two children, Scott and Chris. With roots and ties to New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee, Jill and her family are often traveling – especially to Lake Winnepesaukee...when free time allows.



Her alto voice has been heard on Join The Choir For a Day Day several times. Jill is very happy to be a new member at FCC Natick and looks forward to getting to know everyone and being involved in church activities...as time permits.

Also joining the church on October 16th were Kris and Gina Rovelli. We hope to share more about them and their great kids, Kyle, Ashlyn and Amelia in our next Good Word.



On October 9th we celebrated with Gregory and Jessica Ferriero and their families and friends as Luke began his journey of faith in the sacrament of baptism. Luke’s godparents are Elizabeth Ferriero and Adam Reardon. Joining the children in the church school in helping to prepare for Luke’s baptism were his brothers, Jack and Matt.

On October 16 we celebrated with Sean and Janna Egnitz and their families and friends as Olivia Thayer Egnitz and Ryan Dominic Egnitz began their journey of faith in the sacrament of baptism. Olivia’s godparents are Kim Galvani and Andrew Skipper. Ryan’s godparents are Lisa Egnitz and Joseph Molle. Both Olivia’s dress and Ryan’s outfit were made out of material from their grandmother’s wedding dress. Joining the children in the church school in helping to prepare for Olivia and Ryan’s baptism was their big sister Anabelle.

On October 23, we celebrated during worship with the Windell family. January and Jade made the trip back to Natick from Colorado where they now live with the newest addition to their family Everly Opal Windell, who began her journey of faith in the sacrament of baptism. Joining the children in the church school in helping to prepare for Everly’s baptism was her big sister is Amelia. Everly’s grandparents, Sandi Newcomb and Michael and Debbie Ahearn were also a part of the celebrating

We celebrate the life of the Rev. Dr. Hal Worthley who died at the age of 87. Hal invested much time and energy working to preserve the historic records of New England churches and was a resource not only in assisting with our church records, but he also took time when he was the Director of the Congregational Library in Boston to meet with our confirmation classes and share with them documents and other artifacts that played a part in our history.

We hold our former organist, Kurt Glacy and his family in our hearts and prayers. They gathered on November 5th at the First Presbyterian Church in Glens Falls, NY to remember and celebrate the life of his mother, Ada.

We hold the Brennemen family in our hearts and prayers. Dick Brennemen was Matt’s grandfather died on October 7th at the age of 91. Family and friends gathered to celebrate is long life at Everett’s on October 15th.

The amazing Margaret Carter worked her way out of rehab in record time and is back home continuing her recuperation from a fall. She would certainly welcome hearing from her church friends as she gets back on her feet. Her address is 10 Western Ave., Natick 01760.

In these challenging times we celebrate that nine members of our leadership teams made the commitment to participate in the Realms of Racism training retreat in October, led by our Massachusetts Conference ministers. This retreat followed up on the two Sacred Conversations on Race that we hosted last spring. Looking ahead, we will be joined in worship on January 15th by T. J. Harper, the new Racial Justice Associate for the Mass Conference. Mr. Harper will be our guest preacher as we commemorate MLK Day. Later in the spring, we will be working with recently developed racial justice resources from the United Church of Christ as part of our Soul Sabbatical series.

“Drop-in Time” with Tiffany

An invitation from Student Minister,
Tiffany Spigarolo

Wednesday, November 30, 4 - 6 PM @ Panera's

Wednesday, December 14, 4 - 6 PM @ Panera's

Wednesday, December 28, 5 - 7 PM @ Panera's

The idea of a church being a community is something that has been a part of our faith tradition for ages. If you look back to when we were first building the United States of America, the church was at the heart of each town so that all could get to the church for meeting, discussion, and service. This church does a great job of being Natick's front porch, still remaining in the heartbeat of the town and doing all that we can to reach out to those in the community.

I am so excited to be a part of this community and meet all of you in the church. So I have created a “drop in time” at Panera Bread in Natick. This drop in time gives me an opportunity on a week night to meet with people and get to know each of you. There are no appointments because it is a casual time for you to come and break bread with me and whoever else drops in. There are no time constraints on the amount of time that you need to stay, either. If you have children or youth in the church, I would love to meet them too! I am excited to be a part of this church and this drop in time gives me more opportunity to get to know you. I already had some good conversations with some of you last month when you came to drop in times and I look forward to getting to know even more of you!



Interfaith Addiction Vigil

Remembering lives lost to addiction

Sunday, December 18th, 6:30 – 8:00 PM* in the sanctuary

**Light refreshments will be served from 7:30 – 8:30 PM*

The prescription painkiller and heroin crisis is upon us and having a devastating effect on young Natick residents and their families. While the holiday season can be a time of great joy, it can also be a difficult time of the year for those who have lost loved ones to overdose or those who struggle with addiction and those who love them. On December 18th, the Natick community will gather again to remember those we have lost and raise awareness about addiction in MetroWest.



The evening will include music, testimony, inspirational speaking and interfaith prayer, as well as an invitation to future action.

Sponsored by Natick Interfaith Clergy, Natick Together for Youth, SPARK Kindness & Natick Public Schools.

(Continued from front cover)

street from the church. Threatening letters containing profanity and racial slurs were left on a neighbor's doorstep. While I was glad to read on and learn of the immediate positive response from so many in our community, what a disappointment to realize that hate makes its home even in our town.

I didn't need that kind of wake-up call and neither did you. We know what is at stake. I am sure that you have read or heard in a dozen places by now that those who care about issues like the environment or gun violence or mass incarceration, or equal protection and opportunity for those of every race, religion, gender, ability, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, have work to do. It's true. We do have work to do.

The problems we face will not be solved by quick fixes. But Finn preached the gospel up on Winnepesaukee last Sunday when he leveled the waterfall and cleared the rapids. Finn reminded us that God has not left us to our own devices. The creative and redeeming power of God at work in the world, at work in people we agree with and in people we don't. It is up to us to find what God is doing right now and figure out how to be a part of it. Chances are that it is much more than we have dared to imagine.

Special Guests Launch the Season of Advent at First Church

At the heart of the Christmas story is the reality of people out on the street without a home. Unfortunately that reality has not gone away in the last 2,000 years.

Often it feels as if there is little that we can do to respond, but our congregation has been involved with homeless ministry in many different ways in recent years. Through Family Promise MetroWest, we reach out to homeless families.

Through CityReach we try to make life little more decent for those sleeping on the streets of Boston. With things as simple as socks and decorated Easter eggs we connected with people who don't always have a safe, warm, dry place to call home in Worcester.

This Advent, we invite you to reach out a little closer to home than Boston or Worcester. Our former student minister Douglas Vooyo is now serving on the board of **Chaplains on the Way** just down the road. Chaplains on the Way provides a loving, non-judgmental presence to unhoused men and women in Waltham, so that no person suffering from homelessness or poverty in Waltham will feel they have to walk alone. Douglas also provides pastoral care and presence to individuals in this community.

On November 27th, Douglas will help us launch the season of Advent as our guest preacher. Joining Vicky and Douglas in worship will be Becky Sheble-Hall and Bill Ladd who is currently serving as a student minister at Chaplains. Since serving his student ministry, Douglas graduated with his Masters in Divinity in 2015 from Andover Newton Theological School. He is presently in discernment and seeking ordination with the Metro Boston Association of the UCC. Next February his home church, Allin Congregational in Dedham will host his Ecclesiastical Council as he completes his final step in the ordination process.

Douglas is currently participating in his fourth and final unit of Clinical Pastoral Education at Beverly Hospital with the intention of seeking certification in the ministry of chaplaincy. Douglas's call is to provide chaplaincy in a variety of settings. Before pursuing his seminary education, Douglas was a licensed social worker who practiced clinically in a variety of settings, where he engaged with patients and their families.

Following worship, we hope that you can just us in the vestry for a light luncheon to hear more from our guest about this outreach ministry and how it changes lives.

Advent Giving Project with Chaplains on the Way

Small things make such a big difference to those who are unhoused – fresh socks, a MacDonalds or Dunkin Donut gift card so that they can get indoors for a while, use the rest rooms to wash up and grab a cup of coffee to warm up. A gift card can also create an opportunity for Chaplains volunteers to invite someone who has been on the street all day to sit down and just talk about what's been going on in their lives. As we move into winter, hats and scarves and gloves make a tremendous difference against the chill.



This Advent we are decorating the tree with gift cards and slipping underneath hats and socks and gloves to partner with Chaplains on the Way in making a difference to those who are homeless in MetroWest. You can pick up these items during the week. We also plan to have on hand some gift cards during coffeeshour that you can purchase to add to the tree.

Hope you will find that this Advent Giving Project helps you discover in the middle of all the traffic and crowds and stress, the real reason for the season

Spotlight on Natick and Civil Rights

Sunday evening, January 22nd at 7:00 PM

Natick has a long and rich history, so long and rich that when we dig into the past, we often uncover insights and perspectives that can influence the present as well as our future directions. We begin the new year with a great opportunity to look back and discover some of those treasures. Natick historian, Marg Balcom will be our guest speaker to shine the spotlight on aspects of Natick's history which may be new to you. Civil rights was not born in the 1960's. The continuum of change began in 1638. Learn more from the experts about the impact of civil rights in our core city of Boston as well as locally in the town of Natick.



Blessing of the Ornaments during worship on December 4th

Be a part of a New Congregational Care Holiday Tradition at First Church!

The word “holiday” has its roots in two simple words that we normally don’t associate with days off. The words are “holy” and “day.” Holidays were originally holy days – days for honoring the saints or times in the life of Jesus or the early church. They were occasions to set aside work and celebrate with food and fun and all sorts of festivities that the sacred breaks into our ordinary time.

We hope to reclaim a sense of the sacred in our celebrations this year, which is not to say that we want things to be all stuffy and serious. Holy days should be full of laughter and songs and gathering around tables and bringing communities together.

Here is a one way that we think might help us find a little “holy day” in the “holiday” rush. We invite you to bring to church on December 4th something from home that is a part of your holiday traditions. Maybe it is an ornament from your tree or a figure from your crèche or a book that you always read your kids or a recipe that you make, or a map of a place that you always go. We will have tables around the sanctuary where you can display your items during worship. We would love it if you label it with your name and write up just a brief description of what makes the item you chose significant in your celebration.

During worship, we will bless those symbols of our celebrations so that when you take them back home, you will have that item as a reminder of the way that all of your customs and traditions open you up to notice the blessings all around you this holiday season. Following worship, we will invite everyone to walk around and explore the items on the tables. We hope that this sharing will be a delightful way to bring us a little closer together as community by discovering something special to each of us. You certainly are welcome to bring multiple copies of recipes or stories or customs to share that others might be eager to add to their celebrations!

Introduction to the Old Testament, Part 2

Sunday, December 4, 11, and 18 @ 9 AM

Jonathan Guest will facilitate this three-part series, based on an excellent new resource from the Mass Bible Society. Part 2 will pick up where our October series left off and will explore the later works of Hebrew Scripture, including the significance of the prophets to our understanding of Jesus. Discover how ancient peoples thought about their world and the impact of the march of empires across biblical lands. Glimpse through the words of story, song, history, and law of the rocky, raucous, faithful, fumbling beginnings of one of the oldest religions on earth. It’s a great opportunity to explore the connection between our Advent readings from the prophets and the way those traditions are incorporated in the gospels! Participating in Part I is not required to join in the conversation for Part II, nor is any prior study of the Bible. Just come as you are because you are a part of the story too! Cost for the book is \$15.

Looking for a “Friendly Face” or two!

Our Congregational Care Team would like to invite you to help our homebound and elder members feel more connected to their church home, even though circumstances, especially in the winter months, prevent them from joining us for worship and other events. We can give you some information to help you get to know your person. Training is available if you feel like a rookie and we are happy to go along to make introductions.

The shape of the relationship that you make with your homebound member depends on what feels right to the two of you. Maybe it’s dropping by with a bouquet of flowers or some homemade bread. Maybe it’s a monthly visit or some combination of cards and phone calls. If you have children at home, perhaps they can brighten the day of an “adopted grandparent” but sharing one of their “refrigerator art creations.” Our homebound friends would love to meet your children!

Whatever shape your relationship takes, it will be a sweet addition to the routine of some wonderful folks who lavished time and love and talent on this church to make it as strong and vibrant as it is today.

This outreach is very informal. No meetings to attend, only the support that you need to let your new relationship thrive. If you are interested in participating, contact the church office and Vicky and Saralyn will get you connected (admin@first-churchnatick.org or 508-653-0971).

Flowers for Worship

Do you have a loved one whose memory you would like to honor, or an anniversary or occasion that you would like to celebrate? Or perhaps you just want to give a “shout-out” to God for the goodness of life? Whatever the reason, what better way to lift it up than to say it with flowers! Contact the church office to reserve your date and make arrangements for the delivery of your flowers (admin@FirstChurchNatick.org or 508/653-0971).



“I’m IN!”

2017 Stewardship update

Thanks to everyone who jumped right in this fall to support the mission and ministries of First Church with a pledge for 2017. And special thanks to our Stewardship Coordinator, Jeanette Szretter, members of the Finance Team, and all those who shared either in print or from the pulpit the reasons why they choose to make an annual pledge. Your support makes it possible for First Church to remain a witness to the extravagant welcome of God in the center of Natick for years to come.

But we have some more work to do before the year ends. The initial response on Stewardship Sunday added up to 61 pledges, which is the usual response at this time of year. However, we don’t want to be usual in 2017 with so much going on in our world that demands our witness and our vision. We want to be part of creating an inclusive, safe and supportive community for people all ages, backgrounds and abilities. Our very ambitious goal in 2017 is to move the number of pledges of support beyond 100.

If you have not yet made a pledge for 2017, there is still time. And as an added bonus, all new pledgers will receive a free “A Place for You” limited edition church tee shirt. Returning pledgers are eligible to receive a tee shirt at half price. You can pick up a pledge card any Sunday at any of the church entries – or if you prefer, just contact the office (508-653-0971 or admin@fcc1651.org) and we would be glad to send one out to you. You can either mail your pledge to the office (First Congregational Church, 2 East Central Street, Natick, MA 01760), or drop it in the offering plate on Sunday.



Your support means so much for what we can be and accomplish together. While all gifts are appreciated, a pledge allows us to budget most effectively and set our priorities responsibly. Thank you for the many ways that you say “I’m IN!” and support our “Front Porch” witness in the heart of MetroWest!

Stewardship Moment

On October 23rd as part of our “I’m IN” 2017 Stewardship Campaign, Jonathan Guest shared this reflection on why he is “Invested.”

Is there any thing more fun than reading financial statements? Perhaps, but you can learn a lot from financial statements. Let’s just take an example close to home: the 2015 Annual Report of First Church.

In brief the Annual Report shows anticipated revenue for our 2016 budget of about \$550,000, which includes annual pledge giving at \$255,000, preschool rent at \$95,000, as well as the antenna fund at \$110,000. But there is another piece - about \$50,000 from our endowments.

Where does that money come from? To find out you go to the list of assets in our FCC financial statements. And there is your answer – an endowment of about \$1.7 million. Interesting, but perhaps now you’re asking, “What has this to do with stewardship?”

I want to share my answer with you. I’m here to urge you to join Vicky and me to make a gift to our church’s endowment. Vicky and I added a bequest to First Congregational Church of Natick through our wills when we updated our estate planning. I hope you will too. None of us will be here forever, but we want our commitment to this church to remain and have an impact in this community for decades to come.

Why should we do this? Permit me quick detour. In an op-ed column I read on Friday, I found the following: “Moral communities are fragile things, hard to build and easy to destroy.” I’ve found this political season dispiriting – probably you too. Part our dismay comes from watching institutions and traditions and values we treasure – and depend on – be tossed aside, even scorned and trashed.

But out of this troubling time, we’re reminded how precious, energizing and inspiring institutions can be, when proper values prevail. First Church Natick – this community – you here – show this. And what are those values? I’d suggest three: a deep sense of trust, a belief in openness or transparency, and a commitment to fairness. I could say much more, but we haven’t time today.

These, to me, are the values I want our children, especially our young adults, to learn by being part of our community. People who live with those values are confident, optimistic, and know how to love.

That’s the commitment we in this church make to each other and to coming generations. That is why I urge you to begin thinking now about, not just your stewardship contribution for 2017, but the gift you will make – when the time comes – to our endowment so that the fine things we do now will last for years to come. Vicky and I are invested in First Church. We hope you’ll join us!

Reflections on a retreat

By Sarallyn Keller, Director of Spiritual Vitality & Congregational Care

I wish there was an adequate way for me to share the church retreat experience with all of the people in the congregation who weren't able to join us in New Hampshire for the Veteran's weekend. I expected that the trip north would give us distance from our regular, hectic daily life so that we could refresh and renew ourselves. I didn't know just how badly we would all need the peace and tranquility of the shores of Lake Winnepesaukee! We arrived reeling from the recent negative election cycle and were seeking a balm to shore up our shaken faith in the concept of America as we used to know it.

When we were planning the retreat, I had hopes for many things: I hoped that we would find a sense of peace in the quiet of the camp setting; a sense of awe in the majesty of the magnificent view from the summit of Mt Major; a sense of personal growth in the exploration of our own individual journeys; a sense of the sacred in the sharing of experiences; and a sense of community in our time together. To say that the retreat exceeded my expectations is an understatement. I will never know if the convergence of the election results with the tranquil setting of Brookswoods had anything to do with how everyone seemed to show an expanded vulnerability and openness that allowed us to go deeper than I expected, but we did... go deeper.

The movie, *The Book Thief*, showed us the power of words and imagination to get us started on the process of opening to new possibilities. We spent time exploring where we are in our life journey and what new doors we might want to open. One of the most powerful moments in the retreat was during the worship service on Sunday. We were sitting encircling the altar, where we had created a visual representation of where we are on our journey. As we were engaged in worship, 21-month old Finn began carefully exploring the altar – first he began moving the rocks (which for some of us represented obstacles and for others of us represented solid ground) and then he rearranged the boats that represented each of us. His careful manipulation of these objects turned our metaphors upside down and inside out; it was as though the creator was reorganizing the world. Finn blew apart our assumptions and made us see our constructed symbolism with fresh eyes.

We enjoyed the spacious facilities, the tranquil grounds, the fantastic food, the thrill of a movie theatre (complete with snacks and popcorn!), the rich geology and flora of New Hampshire, the excitement of air hockey and ping-pong, the calm of morning meditation, the delight of mastering origami boat-building and so much more! We will do this again because the retreat allowed us to find renewal and because the experience was transformative – the Holy Spirit uses what is available to work wonders in our life.



New Advent Devotional from the Stillspeaking Writers Group

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Isaiah 11:6-9

Wolves and Lambs: Advent Devotional 2016 from the Stillspeaking Writers' Group is not a typical – or tame – Advent devotional. This unique collection of Advent devotions will push and challenge you through the season as much as it will inspire and enlighten you.

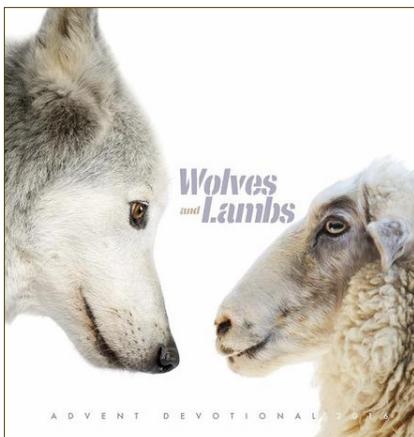
Wolves and Lambs begins on the first Sunday of Advent (November 27) and includes a scripture verse and prayer for each day of Advent and Christmas Day.

Devotional titles include: *Wolves Are Coming, Locusts and Chocolate, Rats and Cats Rejoicing Together, Preaching to the Choir, A House for the Homeless Messiah, and Holy Applause.*

Why did the Stillspeaking Writers' Group choose the title, *Wolves and Lambs*? “We think the image of a wolf and a lamb lying down together should be comforting, yes, even sweet. But it should also be deeply unnerving. As the first Christmas was. As this one will be, if Isaiah and God – and we have anything to say about it.”

These readings are a great way to center your spirits in the hectic holiday season and open yourself to receive the gifts of peace and love and hope and joy that Advent offers to all who seek the real “reason for the season.”

A \$3 donation will help us defray the cost of offering these booklets.



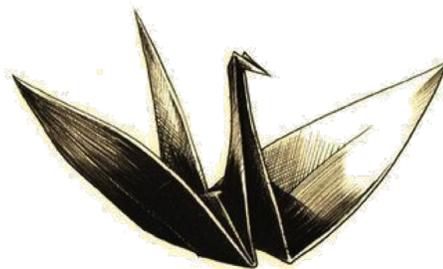
Peace Cranes for Christmas

Help us decorate the sanctuary for Christmas! The work and the mission of our faith starts with peace and so we want to fill the sanctuary with peace cranes to symbolize that foundation of peace that lies beneath all of our hopes for our community and the wider world – ending gun violence; housing the un-housed; stopping the school to prison pipeline; ending racism and homophobia; attaining environmental justice; caring for those with substance use issues; the list could go on and on. Without a foundation of peace, where we are willing to truly listen to one another, we don't stand a chance of attaining any of these goals. So let's fill our sacred space with peace cranes as a visual symbol of our commitment to peace with the hope and love that follows.

Peace Crane Workshops:

- Sunday, December 4 at noon in the vestry
- Sunday, December 11 at noon in the vestry

See Saralyn if you are looking for origami instruction but can't attend one of the workshops. All ages are welcome but younger children may find the origami process challenging.



Acts of Kindness

In a time when we are seeing more bullying, violence and hateful acts in our schools, communities and in the larger political arena, we want to encourage our FCC family to promote compassion and thoughtfulness in their every day lives. During advent, as part of our Christmas peace crane project, you will be invited to hang peace cranes on the branches of the Christmas tree in the sanctuary as a symbol of an act of kindness that you performed during the previous week. Our Peace Tree will be a visible witness to our care and concern for one another and for our larger community.

It is said that a thousand folded cranes, one for each year of a crane's fabled life, makes a wish come true. The thousand origami cranes were popularized through the story of Sadako Sasaki, a Japanese girl who was 24 months old when she was exposed to radiation from the atomic bombing of Hiroshima during World War II and soon developed leukaemia. At the age of 12, she began making origami cranes with the goal of making one thousand, inspired by the senbazuru legend. In a fictionalized version of the story as told in the book "Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes," she folded only 644 before she became too weak to fold anymore, and died October 25, 1955. In her honor, her classmates felt empathy and agreed to complete the rest for her.

At the Well

Sunday, December 11 @ 7:00 PM

Our next gathering “At the Well” will be on Sunday, December 11 at 7:00 PM. Join us to refresh your spirit with mindfulness meditation and centering prayer. Many of us think of trying meditation, but it can be hard to know where to begin. It may be hard to find the time, to be able to sit still, to keep the mind from racing, or it might just sound boring. It’s easy to find excuses for why we can’t meditate, but there are just as many reasons to give it a try! We gather to leave our anxieties at the door and to find a quiet center that helps us to lower stress, improve focus, connect better with others, and understand our pain, just to name a few. Come, drink at the well to quench your thirst for inner purpose and meaning in your life.

Light the Night with Hope

December 14th, 18th and 21st

As we slide into the darkness of the winter season, First Church can be a beacon of hope in our corner of the world. In a time when so many are feeling hopeless, we have a message of love and hope and peace and joy that we can share with our neighbors.

This December brings a number of opportunities to light up the front of the church with luminaria and we would like them to bear witness to those messages of love, hope, peace and joy we wish to share.

To that end, we will have luminaria bags available during coffee hour beginning on November 27 and continuing for the first two Sundays of December for you to decorate with words of encouragement.

Share your hopes and dreams for our town and our country; draw your vision of peace and love; how you decorate the bags is up to you. We will line the front of the church on **December 14**, to mark the anniversary of the Newtown, CT shooting; and again on **December 18** as we gather to remember those from our community who have died from the opiate crisis; and again on **December 21** as we mark the winter solstice with a labyrinth walk.

There may be darkness all around us, but we know where light may be found!

Solstice Labyrinth Walk

Wednesday, December 21 @ 7 PM

Step away from the hectic holiday frenzy and join us for the Winter Solstice Labyrinth Walk. You will find this a place to quiet the mind, calm the body and stir the spirit. As you walk the slow spiral with soft music and candlelight washing over you, you will feel a sense of peace to your inner core. People who regularly walk a labyrinth find that this ritual makes them feel more centered and brings a clarity to life issues. What better time than the longest night, to turn inward and seek the light that may be found within each one of us.



God On Tap

Wednesday, November 30th, 7:30 PM

@ The Morse Tavern

There have been a number of amazing bestselling books out recently on the subject of how we approach end-of-life issues. We will take on this subject at our next gathering of Pub Theology on November 30th. Join us for munchies and a refreshing beverage, along with engaging conversation about how we approach our final years and the concept of death in our society.

Caring Conversations

Mondays: January 23, 30 & February 6 @ 7 PM

One of the supporting structural beliefs in the United Church of Christ is that we are all called to be ministers to one another. We are called to show one another love and compassion. You might care, but are you intimidated by the idea of visiting someone in the hospital? Does it seem overwhelming to deliver Easter lilies to someone you don’t know? What does it mean to be engaged in lay ministry? We invite you to join us to learn how to be a better caregiver and listener. For three consecutive Monday evenings beginning on January 23, we will engage in a small group discussion about the ministry of congregational care and visitation. We will attempt to de-mystify this ministry of compassion and care to make First Church a place where we are engaged in supporting and affirming each other with love.

Faith vs. Fear

Wednesdays: January 4, 11 & 18 @ 7 PM

Over 30,000 people are killed each year by guns in the United States. Should we simply accept the toll of gun violence as the norm in our nation? Isn’t it time that we looked more deeply at the problem of gun violence from our faith perspective? Engaging in the sometimes difficult dialogue around gun violence is one important step in the process. Over a three-week period beginning on January 4th, we will examine the issue of guns in America and discuss how we might be called to action.



Join us this Christmas season for these special services!

Christmas Family Worship

Sunday, December 18th during worship

The Sunday before Christmas is always a special one at First Church when we invite the inner child in each of us to delight in the stories and songs of the season. On December 18th, we hope you will be on hand to hear again a reader's theater version of the wonderful tale of "The Littlest Angel" augmented by the musical talents of some of our younger "Firsties" who will be donning tinsel haloes and sharing the music of the "heavenly host" to bring our story to life. If you would be interested in joining the cast of our Reader's Theater, we would love to include you. Just contact Vicky (508-653-0971 or pastor@firstchurchnatick.org).

Christmas Eve Worship:

A Service of Carols and Candles @ 7 PM in the sanctuary

We turn back the clock and listen again for the decree that came from Caesar Augustus, and angel songs in the night sky and the clip-clop of the donkey as a young couple made their way through the crowded streets of Bethlehem. With the carols of the season and special music of choir and instrumentalists and soloists, we will retell the story of the night that the stars sang.

The service is designed for all ages because on Christmas Eve, the child in each of us comes alive with memories of Christmas past and expectation of the Christmas to come. As this hour-long service comes to a close, once again in the darkened sanctuary the light will go out from the Christ light on our Advent wreath to illumine the faces and the hearts of everyone in the pews as we join in the hushed verses of "Silent Night." Surrounded by the evergreen, circled by lights, we will welcome the Light of Christ, and discover that it is never too late to prepare him room.

Watch Night

New Year's Eve: Sunday, December 31st @ 7 PM

Ring in the New Year with music and silence, with poetry and prophecy, with candles and bells. We will start with a simple soup supper and continue to the sanctuary to celebrate our hopes and prayers for the New Year together. Join us at 7:00 PM for supper. Please RSVP so we know how many places to set at the table (sarallyn@firstchurchnatick.org).

Christmas Poinsettias:

Place your order after worship December 4 or 11

Help decorate the sanctuary for the holiday season! Order a poinsettia to remember a loved one or to celebrate a blessing! Your gift will do more than add to the beauty of our sanctuary at Christmas. Following worship on December 20th, poinsettias will be taken to those in our church family who are not able to be with us for worship.

Look for Flower Ministry volunteers in the narthex as you leave worship on December 4th and 11th and give them the message of dedication or celebration that you wish to have printed in the order of worship. The cost is whatever you can contribute.

Volunteers needed to deliver poinsettias to our homebound members after worship on December 18th!

We have a number of members and friends in our congregation who are homebound, especially during the winter months. We are hoping to find some volunteers who would be able to take a poinsettia from our morning worship service to them after worship on December 18th.

If you are able to volunteer, please sign up in the vestry during coffeeshour in December or contact the church office during the week (admin@fcc1651.org or 508-653-0971).

Thanksgiving Pies for the Natick Service Council

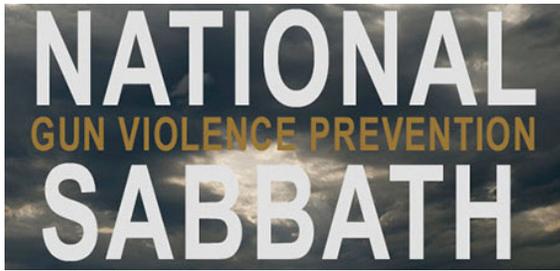
Our deepest thanks to all who donated a Thanksgiving pie to the Natick Service Council. The WV Workcampers and Senior Youth were busy in the church kitchen on Thanksgiving Sunday, cooking up a storm! During the holidays, the Natick Service Council reaches out to provide more than just the essentials. This year the Natick Service Council will again distribute more than 150 Thanksgiving baskets to local families in need – and many of those baskets will be further blessed with one of almost 60 pies!

Thank you for your generosity!



Silent March: Gun Violence Prevention Sabbath

December 14th through 18th



The “Silent March” uses empty shoes to graphically illustrate America’s preventable epidemic of firearm-related deaths, injury and trauma. The “Silent March” is a call to action demanding that our government act swiftly, intelligently and boldly on this issue in order to save the lives of real people who deserve to have a future.

Massachusetts is working to close the final loopholes in its firearm regulations but the strength of our state laws is greatly compromised by easy access to firearms just north of our borders. The availability of weapons in northern New England worsens crime and overdoses that we face locally. Opioids flow north as guns come south. We need to advocate nationally for the changes that can save so many innocent lives lost to suicide, domestic violence, accidental shootings and simply being in the wrong place at the wrong time. In these challenging times, your witness is needed!



You can be a part of the “Silent March” by dropping off old shoes at the church office any time before December 14th or you can add them to the “silent march” display on the front steps of the church between December 14th and 18th.

Refresh Your Spirit – Host Coffeehour!

Coffee Hour is one of the things that we do every week that makes Sunday special. Now it is easy to host! No need to come early and make coffee!! Our custodian will have the pot ready to go and tablecloths on the serving tables.

Volunteers just need to serve and clean-up. No food necessary, unless you have something you wish to share! We will have non-perishable items stocked on a rolling cart and juice and creamer in the fridge. Just leave worship on the last hymn and you will have plenty of time to put things out on the table. At the end of coffee hour, rinse out the pot and the cream pitchers, fold up the tablecloths, return supplies to the cart and roll it back into the kitchen and you are done.

You can sign-up on the clipboard on the coffeehour table, through the church office (508-653-0971) or website (www.firstchurchnatick.org) or you can just scan this code! Hosts are still needed for December 25th and throughout 2017!

West Virginia Work Camp Kickoff Meeting

Sunday, January 15 @ 12:30 PM in the vestry

West Virginia Work Camp is a week of service, faith formation, community building and Christian ministry. The first meeting in preparation for the annual ecumenical service trip to the Cabell/Lincoln county work camp (June 18 - 25) will be at 12:30 PM on January 15th in the vestry.

The West Virginia work camp involves a number of adults and youth traveling to West Virginia for one week every summer to repair homes and make them warm, safe, and dry. In addition to serving others for a week, this trip is an amazing opportunity to meet youth and adults from all over the country, and to reflect on the meaning of service and faith in a multicultural and relational Christian ministry. Be ready to be transformed!

Questions? Contact Steve Williams (774-270-1652; scribble46@verizon.net).

Youth Leaf Raking

Our first Youth Group service project of the year took place on November 4th when youths and adults joined up to rake leaves for some of our elder neighbors in Natick. We made quick work of the project and will be looking for more opportunities like this one to make a difference in our corner of the world.



Third Annual Family Promise MetroWest “Keep the Promise” gala is another huge success!

The Third Annual Family Promise MetroWest Food Tasting Gala, “Share the Promise” was held at Temple Shir Tikva in Wayland on Saturday, November 5, 2016. More than 425 guests gathered to support the FPM mission, providing community support of families that are homeless. Over 15 food and beverage vendors offered samplings, while several musical groups performed. Guests generously bid on live and silent auction items donated by local businesses and friends of the organization. Fund-raising totals are being finalized but certainly exceeded its expectations for the event and raised over \$90,000 for its Shelter, Transitional Living and Steps to Success Programs. It is clear that Family Promise MetroWest is the beneficiary of great enthusiasm and commitment by our 50+ participating congregations from more than 12 nearby towns. Thank you again for being part of our success; together we continue to make a difference.

Several FCC members were in attendance as guests and volunteers.

The women of First Church Natick will gather again for First Ladies Pub Trivia Sunday, January 15th, 7:45 PM at the Dolphin Restaurant

All women of the church are invited to join us for our next gathering for Pub Trivia at The Dolphin on January 15. You don't need to have expertise in any particular area of trivia knowledge – although it does help to have an active sense of humor!. Email Gretchen DuBois (gdubois2003@gmail.com) to RSVP your attendance and to ensure that we secure enough seats at the table for our team. The Pub Trivia game starts at 8pm. The rules are easy, there is plenty of time for conversation and to connect with other women from the church over munchies and beverages in between rounds, and there are usually warm chocolate chip cookies served before the game ends – so many reasons to give it a try!



Best Friends, Worst Enemies: Understanding the Social Lives of Children

Wednesday, December 7th, 7:00 PM at NHS

(For parents and caregivers (preschool through middle school.)

We welcome back psychologist and best selling author Michael Thompson, PhD, for a discussion of the complex social world of childhood, including friendship stages, popularity, social cruelty and how to support your child's development.

This presentation walks parents through the complex social world of childhood and addresses a number of questions: What do social relationships in school predict about happiness in adult life? What is the normal sequence of child friendships, from the parallel play of the two-year-old to the intimate self-disclosure of the adolescent? Why do cliques form and what are the differences between boy and girl groups? Why are children scapegoated and how can their parents and school protect them? Dr. Thompson will draw on research to highlight the differences between friendship and popularity. He makes suggestions about the management of social problems in schools and makes the case that while all children yearn for popularity, it is friendship that helps children survive and thrive.

The Importance of Play in Supporting Literacy

Wednesday, January 11, 7:00 PM at NHS

(For parents and caregivers (preschool - elementary school.)

Carol Westby, PhD, international expert on play and literacy and developer of the Play Scale, speaks about the critical importance of play in building literacy and social development in preschool and elementary age children.

“Play is often viewed as what children do when they have nothing better to do. Yet it is through play that infants, toddlers, and young children develop and demonstrate their understanding of the world – an understanding of the interrelationships among people, objects and events. This program will present current theories about play and learning, the development of various dimensions of play, and the interrelationships of these dimensions of play to children's language, social-emotional skills, selfregulation, and literacy from infancy through early elementary school.”

For more information and/or to register for these programs, SparkKindness.org.

Riverbend Bible Study begins at the beginning!

December 1st & January 5th @ 2 PM

The story of Cain and Abel opens with a portrait of a stable, productive family and ends with one brother dead and the other a fugitive. What tore the brothers apart is both surprising and familiar. It is the realization that life is not fair and how that realization can sometimes boil over into anger and destructive jealousy. We pick up in December with the story of Cain and Abel and then continue humanity's downward spiral with the story of Noah in January and puzzle over these stories of a God who plays favorites and has regrets. Really?

We meet in the library at Riverbend Rehab, 34 South Lincoln, South Natick, hosted by Barbara Hayes and Alva Chapin. Our meetings occur on the first Thursday of the month. No preparation is required. We will have all the materials on hand and can get you up to speed lickety-split if you have to miss a session. If you need transportation to Riverbend, contact the church office and we will arrange to pick you up (508-653-0971 or admin@firstchurchnatick.org).

Lunch Bunch

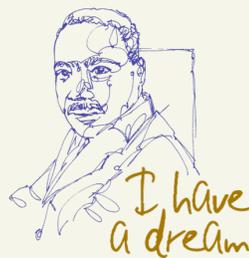
Friday, December 16 beginning at
12:30 PM

How can it possibly be December already? If you are feeling as if you were just passing out Halloween candy and now it's time for Ho, Ho, Ho and mistletoe, it means you need a break and what could be better than Lunch Bunch!

Lunch Bunch is an ideal way to get out of the house and warm up with the company of great people and good conversation. Everybody is welcome at "Lunch Bunch!" Just bring along a brown bag lunch, but leave some space for treats because there are always some tasty goodies to share. Even if you can't linger, stop by and say hello. If you need transportation, contact the church office and we would be glad to arrange to pick you up (508-653-0971 or admin@firstchurchnatick.org).

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. 12th Annual Natick Community Celebration

Monday, January 16 2016, 10:00 AM
Wilson Middle School Auditorium



*Music by the Johnson Elementary School "Peacemakers
Performance Groups from the Middle & High Schools*

Guest Speaker: Jim Kates, Freedom Summer 1964

At a dangerous and uncertain time in his ministry, Dr. Martin Luther King prayed for courage, and he heard God say to him, "Martin, stand up for righteousness. Stand up for justice. Stand up for truth."

Those words have continued to echo for more than 50 years in the hearts of those who seek the courage to be the kind of change that they hope to see in the world. Once again, we find ourselves living in times that require courage and passion and commitment.

And so on Monday, January 16th at 10 AM, we hope you will join with a wide variety of representatives of the Natick community for an Interfaith Service Honoring the Life and Witness of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in the auditorium at Wilson Middle School. Stand up for justice and truth in a world that is far too quick to label people by their race or ethnicity or beliefs.

Our speaker in 2017 will be Jim Kates, who comes to us through Facing History and Ourselves. As a 19-year-old college student, Mr. Kates worked with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) which brought together both black and white volunteers. In 1964 he traveled to Mississippi as part of "Freedom Summer" to advocate for civil rights and equal voting rights for African Americans.

We will be greeted by town and state officials and enjoy the music of the Johnson School Peacemakers as well as performance groups from the middle and high schools. Students from the middle and high schools will also share their prize-winning essays from the MLK Essay Contest, sponsored by the Natick Interfaith Clergy Association.

Through the offering at the celebration we will continue to move toward the goals of Freedom Summer through our support of Natick METCO. For almost 50 years, our town has been committed to supporting diversity in our public schools through our participation the METCO program, which makes it possible for Boston students to attend public school in surrounding, largely suburban school districts.

Following the celebration, everyone is invited to the cafeteria where there will be service opportunities for all ages. At a time when polarization seems to be the norm, we hope you will add your voice to the celebration. We can make a difference in our little corner of the world. Now more than ever, we need people who again will "Stand up for righteousness, stand up for justice and stand up for truth."

Seven agreements for productive conversations during difficult times



Here are some helpful guidelines for conversation from Vu Le, the Executive Director of Ranier Valley Corps. The mission of Ranier Valley Corps is to bring more leaders of color into the nonprofit sector and getting diverse communities to work together to address systemic issues.

1: Let's give one another a break:

...When emotions are this high, we are more likely to be less patient with one another, less forgiving. Everything sets us off. This is not the ideal environment to discuss heavy topics like racism, classism, urban/rural dynamics, etc. It is important that we reflect on these issues so we can better strategize, but let's remember that many of us are still in shock and fear.

2: Let's provide feedback on actions and opinions, not motivation or character:

In this sort of environment, it is easy to lose focus on ideas and actions; instead, we start questioning people's motivations and attacking their character... Let's check ourselves when we do that. It never does any good. People never respond well when their character or motivations are being questioned. It shuts down conversations, or worse, generates in-kind retaliation and perpetuates a vicious cycle.

3: Let's assume the best intentions, but also address impact:

Most of us try our best to be helpful during difficult times. But often, the intention ends up causing more harm... In trying to be helpful, many of us say and do things that may not end up very helpful. Let's assume everyone means well and let's be patient with one another... When our actions are damaging, we must address them, whether or not they were well-intended.

4: Let's not assume we completely understand one another's reality:

Right now, many communities are hurting... Many of people from marginalized communities don't feel safe anymore, and some of us are not sure we will ever be able to. If we do not come from these communities, let's not assume there is an equivalence with our own background. Let's not assume we know what another person is going through.

5: Let's be gracious in accepting difficult feedback:

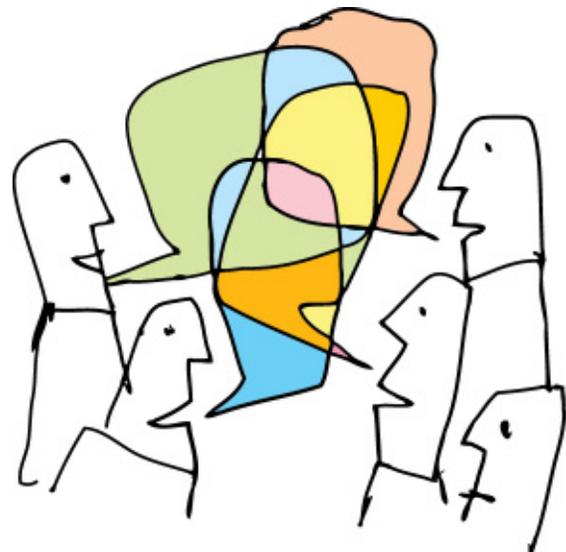
When someone gives us feedback, especially those who come from backgrounds completely different from ours, it is a valuable gift. And it often comes with a price for the person giving the feedback, as they frequently must share vulnerable personal information in order to bring some "credibility" to their feedback... It is easy to be defensive. It is far harder to accept that we made a mistake, or that our well-intentioned actions may have negatively affected someone. Let's give ourselves the grace to be imperfect humans.

6: Let's forgive ourselves and one another:

We're all going to make mistakes... Yet so many of us are terrified that making a mistake means we are a racist, or sexist, or ableist, or transphobe, or ageist. Even the thought of anyone even suspecting us to be any of those things hurts deeply. When someone makes a mistake, it does not mean they're a bad person. We have to forgive ourselves when we make mistakes, and we must try to forgive others.

7: Let's not give up on one another:

We cannot build a strong community if we cannot converse with one another, have hard conversations, disagree once a while, and learn from one another. Yes, this does mean that occasionally we feel uncomfortable and riled up. But so much of the situation our country is currently in may be because so many people in our society refuse to talk to people who hold differing views. Let's not give up on one another. Let's stay and let's talk through the hard stuff. And if we do need to take a break, that's understandable, but let's leave the door open to come back.



NATICK IS UNITED

We stand together and we **STAND UP** for each other.

Due to recent events, many Natick residents have expressed fear and concern about their safety and their place in our community. The Town of Natick, in unity with the Natick Police, Natick Public Schools, and the broad coalition listed below, wish to convey a simple message:

Natick is UNITED and we stand together.

We will not tolerate hateful or discriminatory acts of any kind. We will not allow any fellow resident to be discriminated against, harassed, mistreated or excluded based on gender, race, class, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, learning style, abilities or political party. Further, Natick Police are committed to enforcing the law against anyone committing a hate crime against one of our residents or visitors to our community. Should a hate crime be committed, it will be thoroughly investigated; and, if proven, will be prosecuted to the fullest extent under local laws or federal laws, whichever is most appropriate.

Natick is UNITED and we stand together.

We are a caring and supportive community where all are welcome. Our community is made up of a diverse group of residents of different backgrounds, religions, genders, cultures, political beliefs, races, ethnicities, gender orientations and identities, opinions and life experiences. Though we are different, we are ONE NATICK FAMILY where all are welcome.

Natick is UNITED and we stand together.

We will **STAND UP** for our fellow citizens. As town, community, business and faith leaders, parents, students, police, firefighters, healthcare professionals, educators, coaches, workers, and citizens, we will **STAND UP** as allies for our fellow residents and model courage and kindness for our children.

Natick is UNITED and we stand together.

There is strength in our unity. We will not let fear, bigotry, intolerance or the hateful acts of a few define us. As caring citizens, it is up to us to set the tone for our community. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said: "In the end we will not remember the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends." We will be vocal in expressing our care and concern for each other. We will check in with each other and listen to one another.

To add your name in **UNITY** and **SUPPORT**, visit <http://www.natickisunited.org>.



Stand Together
STAND UP
#natickisunited



Join us for our Special New Year's Day Brunch

Sunday, January 1st at 10:30 AM in the vestry

All that it really takes to make something a tradition is to do it more than once. This year will be our fifth New Year's worship in the vestry at tables instead of in pews. We hope that you will again help to make our New Year's Brunch a true tradition.

On the Sunday following New Year's Day, instead of gathering for worship in the sanctuary, we come together – young and old – to worship as they did in the early church over a common meal together. Once again we will fill the vestry with songs and stories and lots of food and laughter. We will listen for God's great good news for a new year. We will share the story of bread blessed and broken that still has the power all these centuries later to make us one. We will have the chance to make new friends and catch up with old friends.

The Worship Team would welcome a few extra hands with this brunch and special service. If you might be able to offer some assistance – either at the event or with preparations beforehand – please contact the church office and let us know (admin@fcc1651.org or 508-653-0971).

We need about 10 folks who can assemble a very easy recipe with simple ingredients for about 8 people. We are planning again on an egg and cheesy dish, something gluten-free, and maybe a special baked French toast with juice and coffee/tea/milk, bagels and coffee cake and fruit. If you have any special dietary needs, please let us know.

Please sign-up to make your reservation during coffee hour any Sunday in December, or you can contact the church office (508-653-0971 or admin@fcc1651.org). Reservations would be greatly appreciated, but all are welcome!

**First Congregational Church of Natick
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Natick, Massachusetts 01760**

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