



Epistle

SOUTH CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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February 2014

This past Sunday we held our 163rd annual meeting. As part of our morning worship we sang a new hymn, written by our own Bing Honig for our capital fund drive, titled “This Church is Old, This Church is Young”. As we sang I imagined all those other annual meetings that have been held year in and year out since before the Civil War as faithful souls sought to discern the moving of God’s Spirit in all those different seasons. As Bing wrote: “This church is old, God, and full of wondrous stories of how your love transforms its people’s lives.” That line evoked a flood of memories of those wondrous stories I have shared with you over the years. And then we sang: “This church is young, still singing of your glories....” That line reminded me that in this present moment we continue to stretch and grow into the people God would have us be in 2014. At our annual meeting that ability to keep enlarging our vision and our hearts was very much in evidence.

Following up on our pot-luck lunch discussion from last Sunday an open and affirming covenant statement was proposed for our consideration. At the heart of this statement are the words: “As an Open and Affirming congregation, we welcome persons of every sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, racial, ethnic, and cultural background, age, physical ability, economic circumstance, and family structure. As part of the Body of Christ, we are called to love one another, to do justice, to bring release to the oppressed, and to walk humbly with our God. We embrace the diversity of God’s creation and commit ourselves to nurturing relationships of love, responsibility, accountability, and trust with all persons without fear or prejudice.” After questions and conversation we voted to approve this covenant with one dissenting vote. Such a deepening of the covenantal spirit of this church makes me think of Bing’s final line: “Grant us your wisdom as we venture forth, singing your praises, our great love confessing, helping shed your light here and across the earth.”

After that discussion and vote, guest Rev. Quentin Chin told us about the desperate plight of those running out of fuel oil in our community. Quentin is the treasurer for the Emergency Fuel Fund of the Council of Congregations and has his hand—and heart—on the pulse of what’s happening in people’s lives around us. This past Friday, he told us, there was only enough emergency fuel for one family, but there were ten families on the list. One was a young mother with three small children. Another was an elderly man on hospice. Both had used up all other sources of assistance and were about to be without heat on a very frigid night. The other eight families were also in nearly as desperate a situation. This is how difficult things have become in Pittsfield with the federal cuts to fuel assistance and other programs, and the lack of jobs. Quentin was not asking for donations as he thanked South for all our ministries with the poor. But a motion quickly came from the floor to take money from our endowment—not the budget we had just passed—to help with this crisis. After discussion it was unanimously voted to send \$4,000 to the Emergency Fund. For a church that has to count every penny this was an impressive gift. Again, it brought to mind Bing’s hymn and this verse: “Help us preserve this dear structure for the future, where those who hunger, find our kindness shown. Warmed, fed, and welcomed, they perceive your nurture, finding that Jesus’ touch may still be known”. There is a vibrancy in this congregation that never grows old as this church keeps following the path of the Spirit. This was the real message of our 163rd annual meeting and it makes my heart sing.

EPISTLE

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- May Mattoon Alice Gallup
- Ladies Benevolent Marge Demary
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The next *Epistle* deadline is February 23 at 11 a.m.



Epistle

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This yearly subscription appeal gives me the opportunity to thank the steadfast contributors to the *Epistle* who write faithfully on a regular basis. We are indebted to them for their dedication.

- Joel Huntington
- Mary Rentz
- Ann Roche
- Dale Prindle
- Susan Kaufman
- Jean Robertson
- Alice Gallup
- Mary Wheat
- Audra Kinner
- Nancy deForest
- Marge Demary

Also special thanks to Paula Haskell who prepares and distributes our monthly newsletter. Others who write occasionally or have written in the past, are thanked and their contributions are valued.

Please show your appreciation by filling the enclosed envelope with your yearly subscription fee of \$3.00 and placing it in the collection plate on a Sunday morning, or mailing it to South Congregational Church, c/o Pamela Garrett, our business manager, 110 South Street, Pittsfield, MA 01201.

Sincere thanks to all,
Priscilla Anthony, Editor

OUR CHURCH FAMILY

Congratulations and happy birthday wishes to two of our beloved nonagenarians:

Larry Bordon was 97 on January 27th. His daughter Susan said he would love visitors.

Lisa Stuart celebrated her 90th birthday Sunday January 19th, a really auspicious milestone. We send our love to you both.

In Memoriam:

Judie Grady, our former "Treasured Treasurer" died on Tuesday, Jan. 21st in Florida, surrounded by family.

Youth Ministry Director's Reflections

As the church kicks off the Capital Campaign, "Stretching for God's Future" I thought I would take time this month to reflect on my time here as a member. What do you love about South Church? Does it have a certain special meaning to you? Do you think it will be here in the long-term future? Is it worth investing in?

My approach to prayer is a basic one. Be God's servant and have faith in God's will. Simple as it is, it has brought to me great things, one of them, South Church.

My husband Don and I both have worked full time since our children were born. Coming to church each Sunday was something we could do as a family with our two girls. Life for young working couples is very fast paced; church helped slow it down, maintain a weekly "tradition." So much has come out of that, the love of church family, the support and understanding from a very special minister and congregation. It seems in my heart such a stable place. I don't see or feel it ever going away. But.....who's to know?

I believe anything that enriches one life or one million lives is worth investing in - South Church has done just that for me, my family and many, many others.

So...come "Stretching for God's Future" with all of us! Moving forward, South Church will continue to do great things.

Ann Roche, Children and Youth Director





***Our Campaign Prayer
Reach With Joyful Faith***

Generous God, as we plan our fund drive, grant us the courage to dare big things for South Church. We have a vision: a spruced up and weatherproof building, an up-to-date, efficient kitchen for preparing food for those who come to us, and money for missions and unexpected expenses. These are not frivolous desires, but the result of deep thought and deep caring.

Stir us up, God. We ask for the imagination that will help us go beyond puny efforts and reach with abundant, joyful faith that can turn our fondest desires into reality. Help each of us to sense our part, giving generously in our own way, with whatever substance, prayers, ideas, time, and encouragement we can, all of us stretching together to reach our goal.

~ Bing Honig

The following note of thanks was sent to South Church from a grateful recipient of kindness.

December 2013

Dear Church Community and Volunteers,

Hello, Happy Holidays to all of you and your families and friends. Thank you so much for all the good work you do to help those who are struggling to help themselves. Thank you Food Pantry for the Thanksgiving Baskets and how you try to provide what you can during tough economic times, especially now with unemployment benefits cut as well as food stamps.

You made a special dinner possible and without you it wouldn't have happened. My family and I appreciate all you do and even the simple things such as chairs and hot cider set out on that long cold Thanksgiving pick-up line were noticed and we're grateful.

Peace be with you.

Sincerely, A Mom and her two Children

LECTIONARY FOR FEBRUARY

Sunday, February 2 – Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

Micah 6:1-8
Psalm 15
1 Corinthians 1:18-31
Matthew 5:1-12

Sunday, February 9 – Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

Isaiah 58:1-9a (9b-12)
Psalm 112:1-9 (10)
1 Corinthians 2:1-12 (13-16)
Matthew 5:13-20

Sunday, February 16 – Sixth Sunday after Epiphany

Deuteronomy 30:15-20
Psalm 119:1-8
1 Corinthians 3:1-9
Matthew 5:21-37

Sunday, February 23 – Seventh Sunday after Epiphany

Leviticus 19:1-2, 9-8
Psalm 119:33-40
1 Corinthians 3:10-11, 16-23
Matthew 5:38-48



This being Black History Month, I would like to ask people to celebrate the similarities and not focus on the differences between people of color and not of color. ~Lynn Swann

MODERATOR'S MUSINGS

We've just held our Annual Meeting with members joining or changing committees, an "outreach" committee being formed, and the work of the Finance Committee and our Treasurer, Dottie Skutnik, affirmed. Making reports on the previous year, remembering our deceased, singing and praying together - South Church has been doing this for 163 years.

Our meeting included a non-binding vote to approve an Open and Affirming Covenant for South Church. We will hold an official vote in the Spring at a special meeting called to consider a long-overdue revision of our By-Laws. In the meantime, we will use this covenant in worship and hold one or two additional gatherings to explore what celebrating "the image of God in every person" means. Becoming an "Open and Affirming" church is one of the ways South Church is "stretching for God's future."

We, the members of South Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, affirm that our community celebrates the image of God in every person. As an Open and Affirming congregation, we welcome persons of every sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, racial, ethnic, and cultural background, age, physical ability, economic circumstance, and family structure. As parts of the body of Christ, we are called to love one another, to do justice, to bring release to the oppressed, and to walk humbly with our God. We embrace the diversity of God's creation and commit ourselves to nurturing relationships of love, responsibility, accountability, and trust with all persons without fear or prejudice.

Concerning By-Laws, everyone's favorite subject, I am asking each board and committee to look over pertinent sections and make updates and revisions. The church council will convene a small committee to pull all of the revisions together into one coherent document. If you would like to be on this small committee, please let me know directly.

South Church will launch our Capital Campaign, "Stretching for God's Future" at a Kick-Off Brunch on Saturday, February 8, at the Country Club of Pittsfield. We will stretch in fun activities and think more deeply together about how our church can stretch into a renewing vision for our future. The Kick-Off Committee - Kerry Sullivan, Jean Robertson, and Sue Kaufman - will help you get there, and they have activities for all ages, as well as some surprises. This is a church gathering you won't want to miss.

As we move through the next few weeks, pause now and then to contemplate our many blessings, as a church and as individuals. How fortunate we are to have this old church. With our support and vision, this church may yet grow young again as a place offering Christian welcome, nurture, and hope to our own members and to our community.

Mary Rentz



THE FOOD PANTRY

In January the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts held a meeting at South Church with our local Food Bank organizations about ways we might help promote the program. Benjamin Downing and Tricia Farley-Bouvier made the following suggestions: That they count each e-mail, letter, phone call, or visit and take the results with them when they vote in Boston.

The current budget provides 13 million in funds for MEFAP (Mass. Emergency Food Assistance Program) which is level funding from last year. With the increased need and rising food costs this is not enough.

We need to encourage legislators to sign on to Representative Kocot's amendment (Amendment #114 to H .3400) to increase MEFAP to 16 million. Please consider helping. Thank you!

Mary Wheat



“Super Saturday” Event – March 1st in Ludlow, Massachusetts

“Super Saturday” is a church resourcing event sponsored by the Connecticut and Massachusetts Conferences of the United Church of Christ. This year the event will be held on Saturday, March 1 from 8 a.m. to 3:45 p.m. at Ludlow High School, 500 Chapin St. in Ludlow, MA.

45 different workshops will be offered relating to various aspects of church life, mission and ministries. One of the afternoon workshops will be led by Rev. Joel and Rev. Jenny Gregg of St. Stephen’s. The title for this workshop is: Recovering from Our Cultural Addictions. It is described in the Super Saturday brochure: “We are all addicted in some way: maybe it’s our materialism, maybe it’s our relationships, maybe it’s technology. Maybe we are not even sure what it is, but we do know that something internally is off. In this workshop we will begin to examine the role addictions play in our lives, introduce Fr. Richard Rohr’s book, *Breathing Underwater*, and discuss how the twelve steps of Alcoholics Anonymous can be used as a way to move from bondage into greater freedom for us and our world.”

In addition to the abundance of workshops, the speaker for the day will be acclaimed author and speaker, Diana Butler Bass, who will share a message during the opening worship and will lead a mid-day forum based on her work exploring the dimensions of religion and spirituality in today’s world. Diana Butler Bass is the author of eight books, including *Christianity after Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening* (2012) and the best-selling *Christianity for the Rest of Us: How the Neighborhood Church is Transforming the Faith* (2006). Diana Butler Bass regularly leads conferences for religious leaders, blogs at THE HUFFINGTON POST and comments on religion, politics, and culture in the media including USA TODAY, TIME, NEWSWEEK and various television networks.

A brochure about Super Saturday and a description of each of the workshops, along with a schedule for the day, is posted outside the church office. If you would like to attend with Rev. Joel—you don’t have to pick his workshop to come—take a registration form and sign up! If five of us go there is a price break. Financial help is also available. Lunch is provided and good conversation will be had if you ride over with Joel and Jenny. Hope to see you at Super Saturday.



Mission Update

In December, our donations for the Elizabeth Freeman Center were delivered and just in time. They said they were out of diapers and we delivered 11 packages of various sizes. We also donated MBTA passes, gas cards, sweat shirts and pants, underwear, feminine products, soap, baby wipes, and deodorant. All in all, the Giving Tree provided a wonderful amount of giving from all of you. Thank you from the Mission Board.

Our community continues to struggle in these hard times, and Mary Wheat has expressed a need also for baby supplies: diapers of all sizes, baby food, baby wipes, etc., for families that are coming to the pantry. We continue to stretch and reach out in whatever ways we can. So for the month of February we would like to highlight the Food Pantry families. We will put a box near the office for anyone who would like to donate the above items to help out. Thank you.

Jean Robertson

MAY MATTOON

We met on Tuesday, January 7th for a May Mattoon luncheon. It was a cold, frosty day, but thirteen hardy souls attended the event. Our sandwiches were followed by warm bread pudding topped with ice cream and Ruth Austin's special brandy sauce. Those of us who braved the icy roads and walkways had our hearts warmed with this delicacy. Also, plates of chocolates were passed along the tables. Diet was the furthest from our thoughts. Needless to say, we were all in a sweet state of mind.

In our business portion it was noted that several gift baskets were delivered to Berkshire Place. Dick Whitehead acknowledged how pleased he was with his wife Shirley's memorial service reception and donated \$200 to the May Mattoon fund. An additional \$25 was received from their daughter.

The Christmas Cookie Sale raised \$175 even though it was a low-attendance Sunday – another frosty morning. These gifts and sales will help the Mattoon class with their many philanthropic projects throughout the year.

It was voted to keep the same slate of officers for the year 2014.

The next meeting will be Tuesday, February 4th at 12 noon, our usual sandwich luncheon. Hostesses are Shirley Vickery, Dot Kresge, and Pam Garrett. The program is a presentation by Mary Rentz concerning the Capital Fund Drive.

Please remember to bring toilet articles for the Food Pantry.

Alice Gallup

A bell is no bell 'til you ring it,
A song is no song 'til you sing it,
And love in your heart
Wasn't put there to stay -
Love isn't love
'Til you give it away.
~Oscar Hammerstein, *Sound of Music*

Happy Valentine's Day



Women's
Ministry

Message from Our Fair Ladies

We know it's a very busy time here at South Church but we are asking you to think back to November 9, 2013...our Church Fair.

- * What do you look forward to at the Fair each year?
- * Do you think the timing is appropriate – 9:00 – 3:00?
- * Our Luncheon – 11:00 to 2:00? Menu of the luncheon? Self-serve vs. waiters taking orders?
- * Our selection of Crafters?
- * For those of you who volunteered your time so generously, any thoughts on how we could improve?

We really would like to hear from you. We are having a meeting after church on March 2nd so if you could jot down your thoughts in an e-mail, on a piece of paper or give me a call, whatever's convenient, we'd appreciate it. Everyone is welcome to come on March 2nd, please....we welcome your input

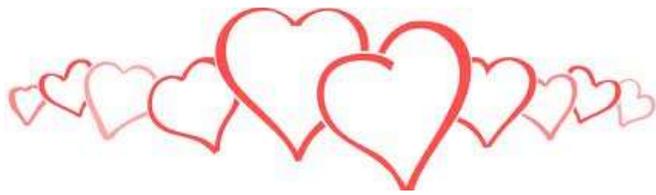
On behalf of Your Fair Ladies,

Kerry Sullivan

413-822-3325 –Kerrsullivan@gmail.com

GOOD ADVICE

- Always keep your words soft and sweet, just in case you have to eat them.
- Always read stuff that will make you look good if you die in the middle of it.
- Drive carefully... It's not only cars that can be recalled by their Maker.
- If you can't be kind, at least have the decency to be vague.
- If you lend someone \$20 and never see that person again, it was probably worth it.
- It may be that your sole purpose in life is simply to serve as a warning to others.
- Never buy a car you can't push.
- The second mouse gets the cheese.
- Don't let facts get in the way of your imagination.



February 2014

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1 AA 10:15 am Lord & Tailor 12-4 pm Al-Anon 7:30
2 Parlor Worship with Communion 10 am "Souper Bowl of Caring" Offering Women's Book Club	3 Yarn Spinners 7 pm	4 Men's Forum Noon May Mattoon Noon Capital Fund Committee 5:30 pm	5 Food Pantry 8 – 11 am St. Joe's Dinner 5 pm	6 Food Pantry 8-11 am Ladies Benevolent 9:30 am Spiritual Support Group 6:30 pm Chancel Choir 7 pm	7 Lord & Tailor 10 am-4 pm AA 6:15 pm	8 AA 10:15 am Lord & Tailor 2-4 pm Capital Campaign Kick-off Brunch 11:30 a – 2:30 p Al-Anon 7:30
9 Parlor Worship 10 am	10 Area Food Bank Meeting 3 pm Yarn Spinners 7 pm	11 Men's Forum Noon Capital Fund Committee 5:30 pm Diaconate 7 pm	12 Food Pantry 8 – 11 am Berkshire Place Worship 10:45 St. Joe's Dinner 5 pm Trustees 6 pm	13 Food Pantry 8-11 am Ladies Benevolent 9:30 am Spiritual Support Group 6:30 pm Chancel Choir 7 pm	14 Valentine's Day Lord & Tailor 10 am-4pm AA 6:15 pm	15 AA 10:15 am Lord & Tailor 12-4 pm Pittsfield Squares 7pm Al-Anon 7:30
16 Parlor Worship 10 am Youth Group Outing	17 Presidents' Day Yarn Spinners 7 pm	18 Men's Forum Noon Capital Fund Committee 5:30 pm Mission Board 7 pm	19 Food Pantry 8-11 am Church & Ministry 4 pm St. Joe's Dinner 5:00 pm	20 Food Pantry 8-11 am Ladies Benevolent 9:30 am Spiritual Support Group 6:30 pm Chancel Choir 7pm	21 Lord & Tailor 10 am-4pm AA 6:15 pm	22 AA 10:15 am Lord & Tailor 12-4 pm Al-Anon 7:30
23 Parlor Worship 10 am House Church 7 p.m. Epistle Deadline 11 am	24 Yarn Spinners 7 pm	25 Men's Forum Noon Church Council 7 pm	26 Food Pantry 8-11 am St. Joe's Dinner 5 pm	27 Food Pantry 8-11 am Ladies Benevolent 9:30 am Spiritual Support Group 6:30 pm Chancel Choir 7pm	28 Lord & Tailor 10 am-4pm AA 6:15 pm	MAR 1 UCC "Super Saturday" Workshops AA 10:15 am Lord & Tailor 12-4 pm Al-Anon 7:30