

ON THE COMMON

Newsletter of Slatersville Congregational Church

A Few Thoughts...A Big Tent

BY REV. KORTE

Hello SCC friends,

What makes a church a “big tent”? Is Slatersville Church a “big tent”? Do you even want to be a “big tent”?

In church, being a big tent is not dependent on the number of people in your community, but rather the tolerance for diversity and opinions among community members. A “big tent church” is both expansive and inclusive. UCC.org reads, “You’ll find a broad range of cultures and styles in our united and uniting church.” More on expansive and inclusive later.

When we describe the United Church of Christ as a “big tent,” we are acknowledging our differences, yet expressing that we desire the unity expressed in John 17: 21 “That they all be one.”

Common sense might dictate that the simplest way to maintain a big tent community would be to avoid anything even remotely controversial. In actuality, the key to a successful “big tent” is not avoiding important conversations or conflict but learning how to have crucial conversations so that differences may be resolved in a healthy way, rather than shelved only to bubble up, even after years of avoidance or walking-on-eggshells. (Please stay after church Jan 21to discuss the lay-led Crucial Conversations group or sign up during any coffee hour.)

A church member recently asked if it is even possible to have a “pastor who is a spiritual leader” in a “big tent” church. Paraphrasing their next question, it would read something like, “Doesn’t the message need to be sort of neutral/middle-of-the-road?”

I think I understand where someone would get the idea that the safest path might appear to be keeping things as generic and tame as possible. The problem with this notion is that we strive to be disciples of Jesus, who was anything but bland. The Gospel isn’t neutral or tame. In my opinion, there will always be folks who just want a nice place to be with people (and SCC should be that) but others may crave the same, while also wanting to be part of a community that is fun, friendly, interesting, and perhaps most importantly, moving with the spirit, and not just surviving.

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Jenni Hull, Moderator
Ruth Mills, Clerk
Jean Meo, Financial Clerk
Margaret Hanoian, Treasurer

CHURCH STAFF

Korte Yeo, Bridge Minister
John Staples, Director of Music
Jill Boday, Handbell Choir
Administrator, Donna Myers
Hope Paul, Nursery Attendant
Romeo Mendes, Sexton

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Michell Eskeli, Diaconate
Alma Morin, Hospitality
Bob Meo, Stewardship
Martha Hunt, Music
Rick Stelle, Property
Gretchen Westhoven, Missions
George Briggs, Christian Ed
Bob Meo, Fundraising
Bob Meo, Projects

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Sandy Gamache
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April McAllister
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A Few Thoughts... (Cont.)

If anything, leading a “big tent” church requires a strong spiritual leader who has a deep understanding of what it means to be expansive and inclusive. There are many reasons to be a “big tent” church, but only one good one. It may come off as politically expedient, culturally or socially acceptable according to societal norms, or perhaps a community might be concerned about being perceived as politically incorrect or intolerant. In my opinion, while these are all rational considerations, they are also pretty bad reasons. The best reason to be a “big tent” church, or any other kind of church, is because that is who you believe God is calling you to be.

I always think of Jesus’s use of undesirables or outright villains again and again as the heroes or recipients of grace in parables. This is a lesson on inclusivity. He is not telling us to admire Samaritans, tax collectors or centurions; he is expanding our idea of who is a child of God by including people that would have been seen as appalling from the viewpoint of a first century Hebrew. Jesus always commends people for their actions, and in the case of the centurion and the hemorrhaging woman, their “faith had made them well.” What faith would that be? Neither one of the people would have been seen to have an emotive remotely acceptable religious viewpoint. We must learn to use a first century lens in context if we are to have any hope of making use of the brilliant teachings bequeathed to us in Jesus’s name, especially if we are to be “big tent” people.

Inclusivity means that everyone is invited to ride on your bus. All God’s children deserve to be welcomed with open arms. Big tents don’t have litmus tests or barriers to entry. The only barrier to entry is feeling the need to bar someone else from riding the bus. If it is truly a “big tent”, you’ll still be welcome, but you may feel like you’re on the wrong bus much of the time. In a church in transition (which you are) there is already stress over identity. We cherish the past, but we acknowledge that the past isn’t who we are now. Yet, we don’t exactly know where we’re going or who we’ll be when we get there, which is unsettling to say the least.

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A Few Thoughts... (Cont.)

In the Exodus story, the temptation of the desert is to turn around and go back to Egypt. We remember fondly the warm home and the food. We forget the shortcomings of the past and remember with nostalgia the “good old days”. Anything that serves as a reminder that those days are gone can trigger a powerful negative emotional response. We forget the rational reasons we struck out across the desert in the first place. Something about the “promised land” was it? When emotions run strong, we forget the spiritual reasons we began our journey in the first place.

As you continue to build a beloved big tent community that can see, understand and be present, you will be there when people need that love.

So this should be easy, right? NO! It’s hard to acknowledge the shadow in ourselves and to “acknowledge the suffering” in others, but it is all part of a spiritual journey of growth. Big tents have many challenges. The first thing to acknowledge is that we all have people we want to kick out of our tent. The second thing to realize is that it’s not our tent, it is God’s tent.

Some questions to consider:

Are we a “big tent”?

Should we be?

What are the benefits of a smaller tent?

Would I prefer that church model?

Do I even want a pastor who is a “big tent” style spiritual leader?

Why or why not? If not, what do I envision as the right fit for me?

For my church?

Thanks for reading,

Rev. Korte

2024 VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!!

Our Church Committees are running a little short-handed lately, and WE NEED YOU!

As we welcome new people to our church family and we try new things,

there is always room for new voices and ideas. Why don’t you add yours?

Most of our committees meet virtually, or on Sundays during Coffee Hour,

so it’s easier than ever to participate.

We can find the right “fit” for your talents, interests, and your availability – just say YES!

If you’re willing to join in this effort, even in just small way, please call or text Jenni Hull at 508-958-4830,

or send an email to slatersvillechurch@gmail.com.

She can help you find the right opportunity for you in 2024!

You can play an IMPORTANT role in creating a bright future for our Church!!



Our Thoughts and Prayers

... are with 3-Year old Everly, and her family upon her recent diagnosis of leukemia

...an anonymous person asking to be touched and healed of a broken heart by the love of Christ.

...are with Alma's friend's twenty-year-old daughter who is in the hospital with a tumor behind her eye.

... are with Tim Tancrell as he is dealing with many medical issues and the recent loss of his mother.

...with gratitude for the great turnout for all three services on Christmas Eve. The service was beautiful and the attendance far exceeded expectations.

NS Food Pantry - January

The NS Food Pantry hours for January are:

- Saturday Jan. 20th @ 10:00am
- Tuesday Jan. 23rd @ 5:30pm
- Saturday Jan. 27th @ 10:00am
- Tuesday Jan. 30th @ 5:30pm

In January the Food Pantry is asking for pasta shapes, cereal and tuna.

Call to the Annual Meeting - January 28!

BY JENNI HULL, CHURCH MODERATOR

Calling all Members and Friends of the Slatersville Congregational Church to attend the Annual Church Meeting on Sunday, January 28, immediately following the 10am Service. The meeting is being called to vote on the 2024 Budget, approve Committee nominations, and decide other matters that need Members' approval. Our By-Laws require a 50-member quorum to certify a vote, so your attendance and participation are crucial. This will be an in-person meeting in the church sanctuary, with a potluck lunch to follow

Stewardship Update

BY BOB MEO, STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE

Dear Members and Friends,
The Finance Committee is trying to finalize a workable budget for 2024 as soon as possible. If you have not yet pledged, please return your pledge card. If you have never pledged, please consider making a commitment this year. If you have already pledged, we thank you for your support. If you have any ideas on ways to help our church stay strong both fiscally and spiritually, please share with a member of either the Finance or Stewardship Committee. We need your time, talents and treasures to help us come together, work together, and share our hopes for a renewed and vibrant future for our church and congregation.

Thank you!



January Sundays

Hello SCC gang,

January is a traditionally slow church month, but it seems like we have plenty going on at SCC.

SUNDAYS

After church January 14th we will have our new member meeting for folks considering joining the church. It should last 20 or 30 minutes and will take place right after the service.

Also on January 14th we will meet during coffee hour to discuss what type of Bible study people would like to have. We have a number of folks signed up and all are welcome to attend the discussion. The suggested times for the Bible Study are Tuesday or Wednesday evening. The day and time of the study will be determined during the meeting on the 14th. The Bible Study will be facilitated by Rev. David Proctor. If you would to co-lead this group, please talk to Rev. Korte. The Bible study will be in-person but may be hybrid for those wishing to participate from home.

January 21st there will be a lay led discussion on creating a “Crucial Conversations” book group immediately after church in Globe Hall during coffee hour. The group will meet on Tuesday or Wednesday evenings and will be facilitated by Margaret and Michell. If you would like to find out more, please join the discussion on the 21st.

January 28th we will have new members joining the church during our 10 am service. This will be a “retreat-style” service, created specially just for you.

Lenten Devotional?

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

Did you enjoy the Advent Devotional? Did you receive the Advent Devotional? Hope the answer is “yes” to both questions. Though it started with apprehension, the devotional reflections you wrote were much appreciated by the community. Many were surprised to see beloved friends, including folks from “away” writing heartfelt reflections. They were great!

Would you be willing to write a reflection for a Slatersville Congregational Church Lenten devotional?

Please reach out to me via email or talk to me in person. We need about twice the number of people for Lent. Not sure you can write a good, short reflection, well...YOU CAN! Many of you weren’t sure you could write a reflection, and you cats knocked it out of the park for Advent, so please... help us create a special memory and devotional books to our friends and family who can no longer make it to church in person.

Thanks and see you soon!

Korte



Update from the Financial Secretary

If you have pledged and requested Pledge Envelopes, either weekly or monthly, please note that the envelopes are not numbered. Your number is noted on your box or packet of envelopes. If you write your name and/or your number on the envelopes as you use them, your pledge will be properly credited to your account. This is especially important if you prefer to use cash.

If you did not request envelopes but would like them, please see me as it is not too late to get them!

Please note: Regardless of how you remit your pledge, your number will remain the same as it has always been if you have pledged before. If you are a new pledger, you will be assigned a number.

If your money is to go towards the balance of your 2023 pledge during the month of January, please indicate 2023 either on the memo line of your check or on your pledge envelope to credit the correct year.

If the amount you are giving is different from your weekly or monthly pledge, please note on your check or your envelope where you wish the money to go (either Operations or Missions) and how much you intend to put in either category. Otherwise I am guessing at your intentions!

If you have any questions or would like to pledge, please see me. I thank you for your attention to the above. Your help is appreciated!

Sincerely, Jean Meo, Financial Secretary

Handbell Choir Notes...

A few of our handbell choir members will be participating in a Winter Workshop held at the UMass Amherst campus and sponsored by the Handbell Musicians of America. We will take a couple of classes and perform some more challenging pieces with handbell musicians from around New England! The concert will be on Saturday, January 27 at 3:15 at UMass. Look for some pictures and videos that will be posted online!

If you are interested in learning more about playing handbells, and possibly joining, you are welcome to our rehearsals any time! We rehearse at 6:30 on Thursday evenings. If there is enough interest, we will create a second handbell choir! There are spring music plans in the works. More information to come!

Thank You!

A heartfelt THANK YOU to the Senior Choir Members and Handbell Choir members for their beautiful music during during the Christmas Season. They are such an important part of our church family here at Slatersville Congregational Church.

Join Us for Crucial Conversations!

BY MICHELL ESKELI AND MARGARET HANOIAN

Please join us on Sunday, January 21 to talk about Crucial Conversations. Here's a little background... What are "Crucial Conversations"?

According to the book, these are conversations that involve:

- High stakes
- Opposing opinions
- Strong emotions

Why are Crucial Conversations important for our church now? As we continue to search for a pastor, we need to work even harder to define what we want for our church. Some things are relatively easy – we want a caring, dynamic pastor who will help us be a strong church. But other topics can be thorny:

- How do we feel about inclusive language in church?
- How do we feel about expansive language in church?
- How will we live into our Open and Affirming statement?
- Do we view the Bible literally or as a guide?

In my experience, these topics bring out Opposing Opinions and Strong Emotions. Also, the stakes are high -- If we aren't clear on these questions, then how will we get a pastor who matches us? (Please note: we will not get 100% agreement on these. But we should be able to describe how most of us feel and how others feel.)

How will this book help us?

The book explains how fear and anxiety crop up and change important conversations from useful to destructive. We hope that the congregation will learn how to spot these things themselves, work on being able to express difficult things and listen to difficult things without emotion shutting down the rational parts of our system and shifting us into thought patterns that lead away from productive conversations.

Missions Moment

BY ALISON PEIRCE

The spirit of giving is alive within our congregation. Each year, the Missions Committee organizes the Adopt-a-Family gift drive. The slips for gifts were quickly snapped up during coffee hour and the gifts were wrapped and placed under the tree. On Sunday, December 17th, the committee gave the gifts to Claire O'Hara who will be North Smithfield's Santa and make three families' holiday season a little merrier and brighter. Thanks to all for your generosity of spirit!

John Staples approached the Missions Committee for financial help with an underwear drive for the homeless in Providence. The church donated \$250 to this worthwhile cause.

Our last gift of 2023 was a \$500 contribution to Foster Forward. Foster Forward supports young adolescents and adults who are currently or formerly in the foster care system. The organization offers GED programs, financial education, the Real Connections program which connects foster youth ages 18-24 with positive, long-term adult role models, a housing program to address homeless youth who have aged out of the foster care system, and so much more. Our own Karen and Karin have received so many kindnesses from Foster Forward as they care for Violet, including diapers, bedding, and most importantly, emotional support and encouragement as they navigate the foster care system.

The Missions Committee thanks each and every person who has contributed to our Missions budget this year so that Slatersville Congregational Church can reach out into the wider community and offer a helping hand and extra kindness to those most in need.