

ON THE COMMON

January 2025

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From the Pastor's Desk...

BY REV. SEAN AMATO

Beloved people, I have to own up to something: even as your pastor, or perhaps especially as your pastor, I don't often find it easy, or even possible sometimes, to translate scripture into reality. On a good day, our world seems custom-made to counteract the better angels of our nature. We're called to be good people in a world that, if we can be honest, too often rewards people who aren't good. Called to be patient, called to be kind, called to be gentle, in a world where those characteristics, those strengths, are often interpreted as weaknesses. Often interpreted as some kind of paltry or perfunctory modern politeness, instead of as an essential part of our faith. And in a world where we might struggle to carry these values, to carry our Christianity, we find ourselves looking for signs, for reminders: "Why do we do all of this? Why be the church? Why be good?"

I find myself asking these questions before a world that seems numb, and unhappy, and disconnected – asking these questions, and expecting no answers. And yet, like divine happenstance, like what has happened to generations of Christians before me, I observed a beautiful sign.

Several days ago, here in this sanctuary, I witnessed my very first Slatersville Christmas Eve services - one at 5pm, and one at 11pm. And in those services, I found my sign. In this numb world, I watched people I'd never seen enter this sanctuary and respond to our service and our church's beauty, point at our wreaths and gasp at the lit votaries on our common. In this unhappy world, I watched people in this sanctuary laugh and hug friends or family they hadn't seen in years; I heard people describe the last time they were here, reminiscing about what this place meant to them. In this disconnected world, I watched total strangers share the light of the Christ Candle between one another – and our sanctuary, previously shrouded in darkness, was lit up by many small flames, all illuminating a different face – some singing, some smiling, others simply watching or swaying with their eyes closed.

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From the Pastor's Desk ... (Cont.)

Seeing these things during the 5pm service choked me up a bit – but it's hard to let that show in front of a hundred and fifty people. So I joined the people with their eyes closed. I opened them to music. Joy to the world, indeed. That moment sent a shiver down my entire body, and I later reflected on the fact that the only other time I'd felt that way in a church was standing in the same place during my second service here with you folks – when, after Rev. David Proctor presided over Communion, we joined hands and sang the Lord's Prayer loud enough, powerfully enough, to blow the top off this building.

Over the last few days, I reflected even further, and realized that this church, its place and its people, its congregants and its staff, this one body of Christ – it reflects Colossians 3:12-17 on a deep, deep level. Colossians 3:12-17, a scripture that calls us to five special values: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

When I think of compassion, I think of people like Jean Meo and Donna Myers – people with soulful concerns for those around them, for the community at large, people who are sensitive to the needs of the world. Those who approach others with the Christian traditions of care and love at the forefront. People who, in their own ways, work to widen and lengthen the Table of the Lord, so that all might come to it – so that our values, our search for goodness and justice, can be made real. Oh God, you lift us up through people like Jean and Donna.

When I think of kindness, my mind drifts to people like Rick Stelle and Palmer Swanson – two men who have helped me and supported me so kindly and graciously, in their own ways, along the path that is being your pastor. I think of those who take part in our Hospitality Committee, people who make sure it's not just our souls that are fed but our bellies – people who take our wholeness into account. Individuals who, in word and in deed, work toward the betterment of their people – people who make special exception for others, who go the extra mile. Holy One, thank you for Rick, Palmer, and our Hospitality folks – for all they do to bolster others.

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OFFICERS OF THE CHURCH

Gretchen Westhoven, Moderator
Ruth Mills, Clerk
Jean Meo, Financial Clerk
Margaret Hanoian, Treasurer

CHURCH STAFF

Sean Amato, Minister
Donna Myers, Administrator
Jill Boday, Handbell Choir
Manoel Ropiaro, Music Director
Hope Paul, Nursery Attendant
Romeo Mendes, Sexton

COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS

Ruth Mills, Caring
Michell Eskeli, Diaconate
Jim Robshaw, Hospitality
Bob Meo, Stewardship
Martha Hunt, Music
Rick Stelle, Property
Terri DeBoise, Missions
George Briggs, Christian Ed
Bob Meo, Fundraising, Projects

DIACONATE

Michell Eskeli, Chairperson
Christine Bonas
Marilyn Briggs
Marsha Brodeur
Richard Brodeur
Sandy Gamache
Martha Hunt
Darlene Magaw
April McAllister
Stephen Wovk



NS Food Pantry for January

For the month of January
Food Pantry hours are:

Tuesday, 1/21 @ 5:30 pm

Saturday, 1/25 @ 10:00 am

Tuesday, 1/28 @ 5:30 pm

This month we are asking
for donations of canned
fruit, baked beans and
tomato Sauce.

From the Pastor's Desk ... (Cont.)

In reflecting on humility, I think in a way that others might see as outside the box: I think of Ropi Jr. who, underneath his charisma, lifts all compliments – all rejoicing – up to God; I think of Bob Meo who, even with his own big personality, helps to establish pragmatic new ways for this church to adapt and survive. God, bless those amongst us who humble themselves, who center themselves in this community, who help all of us to be humble.

When I think about Biblical gentleness, our call to help others instead of feigning superiority or indifference, I think of people like Margaret Hanoian and Jim Robshaw and Darlene Magaw – individuals who seek to support and love people, who seek to make space for and account for and care for people even when it's not convenient, even when it's not glamorous to do so, to do so in a way that calls our attention to our true values. Those who call us away from the sharp edge of our world, back to a God-ordained gentleness. Lord, thank you for blessing us with people like Margaret, Jim, and Darlene.

And in pondering patience, I have no one to thank more than Michell Eskeli – the pastor's keeper, in a real sense. In these last few months, I will admit I've had some very distinct ups and downs – some sincere learning experiences, paired with beautiful exchanges and affirmations. I could not have lasted this far without Michell, with whom I spend more time than my friends or family; I could not have learned this community, learned about all of you, without her well-humored patience and capacity for listening. God, your servant Michell is a blessing; bless her in turn, help us all bless her.

These people have been my signs over the last few months – my living revelations, the people through whom God has taught me so much. I do not mean to single out these people, necessarily, but I suppose I have – and in doing so, I want to note something else: if I didn't mention you, that's not because you're not doing the work. You are. I've seen you do the work, and others have, too. This church thrives on all of us living out our Christianity, together: of taking up Jesus's teachings and translating them into reality. Thank you all, sincerely, for showing me how it's done. May God bless you and keep you, my friends.

Pastor Sean

Epiphany Stars

BY RUTH MILLS

Wholeness

I became a believer when I selected my very first star back in 2010 (I think that was the year!). That year the stars were cut from a foam sheet. I selected the top green one since green is my color. We were told to keep them face down until everyone in the congregation had one. When we were finally told to turn them over, I was amazed. Mine said, "Write." I was sure divine providence sent that star my way. I love to write.

I have received an epiphany star every year since. Some have resonated more than others. Listen..Clarity..Instruct..Sympathy..Strength..Solitude. Obedience..Imagination..Quietness. This year's star (2024) says "Discernment."

In January 2020, my star said, "Singing." I feared John, our choir director, was going to talk me into singing solos, something that is way out of my comfort zone. When everything closed down in March of 2020 due to Covid, I figured I was going to get away scot-free. The joke was on me! That year we recorded services that were made available online. I was recruited several times to sing. At least it was just sound. No one took a video.

In 2021, because we were still not gathering in the church, the star distribution was a little different. Rev. Eileen gave us four words to choose from. We could make our own stars at home and put the word we selected on them. I don't recall what the four choices were but I remember what I selected: Unity. It was just a few days after the U.S. Capitol was attacked by self-proclaimed patriots. Our country seemed to be coming apart and a focus on unity made sense.

Then there is the Epiphany Star that I received in 2019, the one that inspired me to write this. The word was WHOLENESS. I certainly understood the dictionary definition but I could not grasp how to apply it to my life. At choir practice the following Thursday, John had us share what words we had drawn. I told them my word and said I could not relate to it. Everyone tried to help but I still felt unsatisfied.



I pondered wholeness off and on over the next few months, wondering why this simple word was such a mystery to me. Then in late summer, I was watching GoodMorning America. Joanna Gaines of Fixer Upper, one of my favorite shows, was being interviewed. Among the things discussed was the upcoming fall issue of her magazine, Magnolia Journal. The issue was devoted to the idea of wholeness. In no time I had my own copy. I devoured it.

Satisfaction at last! I am so glad I picked this word and had to struggle with it, making it much more valuable. And that is the whole idea. The struggles, challenges, failures, poor choices, and imbalances in our lives are the very things that can help us to become better people. Wholeness is not celebrating our dirty laundry but it is about accepting the lessons learned from all the parts of our lives, good and bad. Wholeness is gratitude, forgiveness, celebration, relief, and finding a path forward.

One page of the magazine features an ancient Japanese art form called kintsugi, or golden repair. Broken ceramics are mended, not with invisible glue, but with gold dust and lacquer, creating beautiful new designs. We can learn to quit fretting about the cracks and broken pieces. We can learn to appreciate the beauty that has been created in us. We can learn to accept ourselves as God's work in progress. Shattered piece by chipped piece, we are made whole, beautifully.

But He knows the way that I take; When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold. (Job 23:10)



Snow Days at SCC!

BY GRETCHEN WESTHOVEN

A reminder to all that if there is a parking ban in North Smithfield due to Snow, Church may be cancelled. If the snow is excessive or travel dangerous, Church WILL be cancelled. If Church is cancelled on a Sunday morning, you can confirm this in the following ways:

- 1) A recorded message will be placed on the church phone system, after 8am, at (401) 769-2773.
- 2) Church Closing information will also be listed on local TV's stations, Channels 6, 10 and 12.'
- 3) Our Church Facebook Page and Website will be updated with the closing confirmation
- 4) Or Check your email on those mornings for an email blast message from the church office announcing the closure.

Missions Moment-December

BY ALISON PEIRCE

As the year draws to a close, the Missions Committee is so grateful to our church congregation for their generosity throughout this past year. Thanks to you, we have been able to continue our mission of outreach in our community, in the state, throughout the country, and around the world.

In December, we felt compelled to help those in our neighboring community who are without shelter or housing. Our donation choices for the month reflect a continued trend of more people seeking food and housing assistance. The Valley Breeze recently reported the following: "Though Woonsocket's citizenry accounts for 4 percent of the state's population, the city has about 10 percent of the state's unsheltered homeless population and 10 percent of all those in emergency shelters, not including waitlists. The most sobering statistic of all, say advocates, is the city's estimated spike in its homeless population since last year: 35 percent." In addition, a recent report by the Rhode Island Community Food Bank states that 38% of all households within the state are considered food insecure – an increase of 11 percentage points over last year, due to rapid cost increases in rent, utilities, transportation, child care and health care, and basic annual expenses.

With those sobering reports in mind, we donated \$400 to New Beginnings in Woonsocket. Feeding lunch to those in need Monday through Thursday each week, New Beginnings has a mission to feed the community holistically, believing in nourishing the entire body, soul, and mind of each person that comes through their doors.

In addition, the committee voted to donate \$400 to the North Smithfield Food Pantry, a mission near and dear to our church's

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Winter Warmth

Thank You For Helping Others Stay Warm

From Our Friends @ Mathewson ST Church...

Our friends over at Mathewson Street Church in Providence, would like to remind everyone at SCC of their on-going Winter Clothing Drive for the unhoused. Warm winter coats, hats, gloves, scarves as well as other clothing are always welcome! This time of year warm blankets are also much needed.

Feel Free to reach out to John Staple at Mathewson Street Church or Helen Lupu at Slatersville Congregational Church for help in donating. Feel free to reach out to SCC's church Office for either of their contact information if you do not have it. Thanks as always for your generosity!

Missions Moment-December (Cont.)

heart. The Food Pantry has seen an uptick in need as the winter months approach and we were happy to give them additional funds to fill their shelves.

To help our neighbors in nearby Blackstone Valley, the committee agreed to donate \$1,000 to Blackstone Valley Emergency Shelter, which provides temporary shelter to those who are homeless or unsheltered and live in the Blackstone Valley in Massachusetts. They have partnerships with eight of the police departments in the area, including Blackstone, Milville, and Uxbridge. Bags of Hope are provided to the officers, which include thermal blankets, gloves, hats, warmers, snacks, and other items. They also provide gift cards to restaurants such as Subway so that the recipient can get a meal, use the facilities, and charge their phone as a paying customer. The officers also help with referrals for shelter and other services that will help those in need in the long term.

The committee also approved providing \$200 to purchase food for those attending the December Sensory Friendly Service and will reimburse the Broaster House for meals provided to the Men's Shelter this month.

Lastly, we want to thank all of you who donated so generously to our Adopt-a Family event in December. All the tags were taken within minutes during coffee hour and every single gift was returned wrapped and ready to go on December 15th. Wow! In addition, many of you who didn't get a chance to take a tag for a gift asked how you could help out. We suggested purchasing additional gift cards for each family, so we were able to add extra gifts to each of our 4 adopted families. What an amazing congregation we have!