

ON THE COMMON

January

From the Pastor's Desk...

BY REV. SEAN AMATO

"In the bleak mid-winter, frosty wind made moan; Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone; snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow, in the bleak mid-winter long ago.

Our God, Heaven cannot hold Him nor Earth sustain; Heaven and Earth shall flee away when He comes to reign. In the bleak mid-winter, a stable-place sufficed the Lord Almighty - Jesus Christ.

Enough for Him, whose cherubim, worship night and day, a breastful of milk and a mangerful of hay; enough for Him, whom Angels fall down before; the ox, and the ass, and the camel, which adore. Angels and Archangels may have gathered there, cherubim and seraphim thronged the air - but only his Mother, in her maiden bliss, worshiped the Beloved with a kiss.

What can I give him, poor as I am? If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb; if I were a wise man, I'd do my part. Yet what can I give Him - I'll give my heart."

Christina Rossetti, "In the Bleak Midwinter" / "A Christmas Carol"

Sometimes, a memorable hymn or spiritual song strikes us differently - and this year, the classic that caught my attention was Christina Rossetti's "In the Bleak Midwinter" (originally titled "A Christmas Carol," and thankfully renamed - imagine that seasonal confusion). There's a story behind this familiar song, and it's one that might resonate with you.

Christina Rossetti, who wrote "In the Bleak Midwinter," was known only lightly for her children's stories and sonnets; her first released work, *Goblin Market and Other Poems*, sold miserably but was critically praised. Her work was critiqued, you see, for the subject matter she discussed: temptation and salvation in the lives of children forced to work; societal and class redemption for those displaced by the powerful; even subjects as sensitive as death and gender were at play in her poems.

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

These were heavy matters, especially for work intended to be read by children. Her critics wondered: why did she preoccupy herself with such troubling fantasy?

Christina Rossetti, you see, was a person deeply informed by her setting and space. While her family members preoccupied themselves with arts and literature, Rossetti volunteered for over a decade at London's Highgate Diocesan Penitentiary - a "reformatory refuge for fallen women" who had been accused of adultery, or birthed children out of wedlock. Many "homes" for fallen women were run as punitive, strict environments, echoing the jeering and sour regard had by society for women who had children out of wedlock or were otherwise accused of 'failing their chastity.' You may be familiar with stories of the Magdalene laundries in Ireland and Scotland, or American "refuge societies" - organizations that purported to "uplift" forgotten women and young mothers before gaining legal control of their lives and forcing them into indentured housework or factory work. Children were often removed from their mothers after coming into the world - or, as was the case in some "reformatory refuges," they were raised to work in the factories alongside their "fallen" mothers.

Christina Rossetti, having come from a family of means and as a person of deep Christian devotion, dedicated herself to public well-being and the well-being of "fallen women" in particular. For her, being with these children of God was a form of gospel work: a chance for her to give her all to support those who had been cast down. Her decade working with the women at Highgate Penitentiary had great impact on her work, too: the troubling stories in *Goblin Market* were said to have been fictionalizations of the troubling childhoods of Highgate's "fallen women."

With this knowledge in tow, reading through "In the Bleak Mid-Winter" strikes me differently. Written in 1872, the poem would have been published after over a decade of volunteering amongst those who most needed society's safety nets to catch them - a decade of sitting with women and mothers forced to reside in (and raise their children in) a state penitentiary. How many holy births was Rossetti present for in that penitentiary?

(Continued...)



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

Reading carefully, it seems to me as if Rossetti's account of the birth seems... tired. Like someone who walked along with the Holy Family, struggled to help find them a room, and then tried to support them during one of the most dangerous times in a young mother's life. Rossetti, having spent so much time literally caring for the "fallen" mothers of London, recounts Jesus's birth as one of many holy births in her midst.

Rossetti knows the state of the world, the complications of "the system" - she's spent over a decade of her life trying to help it. She knows that there's no one fix to what is broken, or people who suffer under a broken world. For Rossetti, every poor child born is another Jesus; every disregarded woman, another Mary. She offers all she has to the newborn babe: she can't bring a lamb or real resources, she can't bring royal gifts or societal approval, she can't fix the world or even find a better stable - but she can give the Holy Family her heart.

This season, you might find yourself tired; you might be exhausted, or saddled with a well-worn emotional fatigue before the state of the world. What could you possibly give to others that might solve their problems, that might offer real support? Start with your heart. Even in this cold season, remember you have a gift to give that no other can compare: your Christian love, delivered unto those who might desperately need it. So take care, and stay warm - because someone might need your warmth so desperately, and soon. God bless you all, my friends.

- Pastor Sean

The Music Committee

The Music Committee would like to thank everyone who participated in the Advent and Christmas Eve services.

Special thanks to:

- Joe Godfrey, our Music Director, for all his hard work in getting the Choir ready for its Cantata and for learning to play the organ for Christmas Eve.
- Jill Boday for leading the Hand Bell Choir and directing the Children's Pageant.
- Mary Stelle for her work with the children to help make the Pageant happen
- Pat Renaud for playing the organ during our carol singing

Each one of you make Christmas magical at SCC. Thank you for your talent, patience and kindness.



NS Food Pantry-January

For the Month of January our Food Pantry hours are:

**Tuesday, Jan 20th
@ 5:30 pm**

**Saturday, Jan 24th
@ 10:00 am**

**Tuesday, Jan 27th
@ 5:30 pm**

**Saturday, Jan 31st
@ 10:00 am**

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

Missions Moment

BY ALISON PEIRCE

First and foremost, thank you all for your overwhelming response to our annual Adopt-a-Family event. Every tag was taken and every gift was returned on time, so that we could deliver the presents to our families before the holidays. Your generosity was truly appreciated. A special thank you to Marianne Lowe for coordinating and delivering all the gifts.

For the month of December, our committee voted to support two organizations. One donation of \$250 was given to Meals on Wheels of Rhode Island. Since 1969, Meals on Wheels of Rhode Island's programs and initiatives have worked to help homebound older adults and other at-risk Rhode Island residents receive increased access to adequate nutrition, safety assurances, and socialization. The organization serves more than 1,300 meals each weekday and helps more than 3,000 clients across the state. In addition to meals, they offer programs you may not be aware of such as a No-Cost Market in Providence, pet food delivery so that homebound clients can adequately care for their pets, and meal vouchers for participating restaurants. We are proud to support such an impactful organization.

The other \$250 of our December giving was donated to Dorcas International Institute of Rhode Island, an organization whose mission is to cultivate an inclusive community for immigrants and those seeking refuge. Their wraparound services include adult education, language learning, job training, citizenship and immigration legal services, refuge resettlement, translation and interpreting, clothing and household needs, and more. At this time when federal funding cuts impact so many critical organizations, our donation is especially meaningful to help Dorcas International continue their important work.



Handbell Choir News

BY JILL BODAY

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Ready for another New Year's resolution? How about trying handbells?? Our SCC handbell choir, On the Common Ringers, will always welcome new players! You do not need to read music or know how to ring a bell. We will teach you! Most of our members started from scratch. We rehearse (almost) every Thursday evening from 6:30-7:30pm, right before Senior Choir rehearsal. (hint, hint... we made it convenient to do both!)

If you're looking for a more advanced way to share your musical gifts, the new community handbell choir, Little Rhody Ringers, continues to rehearse in our sanctuary. This group is for experienced musicians, but you do not need handbell experience. If you can read advanced music, you can be in this group! We are a non-denominational, more secular ensemble. We rehearse on the first and third Saturdays of each month from 10-11:30am.

Want to explore even more about handbells, more concerts, and their history? (It started right next door, in Massachusetts!)

Check out our national and regional website: <https://area1.handbellmusicians.org/>

Our December concerts and music offerings during services were so fulfilling and so much fun! Thank you to everyone for your support of our music ministry. We feel the love!

Wishing you a healthy, happy, and joyous new year!

From the Financial Secretary

BY JEAN MEO

Many thanks to all who have pledged. We appreciate your support. If you have not yet pledged, it is not too late to do so! Everyone who has pledged has a specific number in our computer system. If you would like to know your number, please ask!

If you use envelopes provided in the pews, please write your name and/or your number on your envelopes as you use them so that your pledge will be properly credited to your account. This is especially important if you use cash.

If you remit your pledge on a monthly basis, there are packets of 12 envelopes available if that would be helpful to you. Please see me.

If your money is to go towards the balance of your 2025 pledge during the month of January, please indicate 2025 either on the memo line of your check or on your pledge envelope so the correct year will be credited.

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

Thank you for your attention to the above. Your help is greatly appreciated!



MENTAL

HEALTH

Mental Health Moment

BY JAN GOODRICH

(Jan was a psychiatric Registered Nurse and group leader who taught mental health skills for daily life.)

I was asked to sing a duet at the Quaker Meeting House On Sept. 28th. Then I was asked to do the scripture reading for church on Sept. 28th. Then it was announced that the handbell choir would do our first performance on Sept. 28th. On Sept. 25th the choir rehearsed an anthem and we were told we would sing it on Sept. 28th. That is when I started to have negative/ insecure thoughts... "Will I be able to handle all of this on the same day?" I felt overwhelmed. I became tense. My brain was processing about all the things I had to do for Sept. 28th, so I had some difficulty focusing on the choir rehearsal.

I had just picked up the scripture reading before choir rehearsal. As I was driving home I remember processing, "I hope the reading is not too long and is easy to read!" As soon as I got home, I looked at the reading. My fears were realized! It was a page and a half long. Here is a short synopsis of what it was about: 'Jeremiah prophesied from the Lord in the tenth year of King Zedekiah of Judah which was the 18th year of Nebuchadazzar that the city of Jerusalem would be taken by the kings army of Babylon.' Other people and places included: the field at Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, Hanamel son of Benjamin's Uncle Shallom, and Baruch son of Neriah son of Mahseiah. Then there was an in depth discussion about the legalities of purchasing land and obtaining deeds in those times.

After I read this, I realized the irony and humor of my situation. I tried to read it two more times and as I stumbled over the words, I just started to laugh. I got the giggles and I couldn't even get through the reading, so I put the reading away to deal with it the next day. Then I noticed something. All of the tension in my body was gone! Laughter is the best medicine! A few tips for mental health:

- A sense of humor is your best friend for mental health. It is a great stress reliever and teaches you to not take life so seriously. I was then able to see the triviality of my situation.
- Everything is trivial except for life-and-death situations.
- Feelings are not facts.
- Feelings are distressing but not dangerous. There was no danger in my situation. I would not die from this! Then I was able to
- Change the insecure/negative thoughts to a positive one: "How lucky am I to be able to do four things that I really enjoy doing in one day!!"
- Channel nervous energy into productive activity. The next day I went to see our wonderful church secretary, Donna, who is also a minister. She was happy to help me pronounce the difficult words in the reading. She also offered to try to find someone else to do the reading. I declined because I knew that I wouldn't feel good about myself if I didn't follow through on my commitment; but also I didn't need to because I had used my mental health skills.

My four performances were not perfect because no human is perfect, but I had a lot of fun!! So keep your sense of humor with you and tap into it as often as you can. You may just find yourself accomplishing things you never believed you could!

I wish everyone a happy, healthy, and mentally healthy New Year!!!

Epiphany Stars

"Wholeness"

BY RUTH MILLS

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 Good Morning 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)



Thank You to Bob Villiard....

Many books from Bob Villiard’s personal library ended up on the bookshelves at Mathewson Street Church. One of Bob’s favorite authors was a French author by the name of Teilhard De Chardin. Over a dozen books by De Chardin ended up in the hands of Ramon Andres Rodrigues, someone who frequents Mathewson Street Church. Andres has been blessed by Bob’s gift of books and he has the following message ... it is presented exactly as he wanted it to be...

A Tribute to: Pierre Teilhard De Chardin

In Memoriam of: Robert Villiard -A Faithful student of Tiehrard Work

“Testimony”

*Mon Nomme est Pierre Marie-
my cousin call me just that-
We share our deeps thoughts,
feelings and concerns through letters
We love each other profoundly*

*My Character is forged by...
with sand and stones.*

*My path is action-internal
external and beyond (universe)*

*My path! is Christ sufferings in
Golgota - I believe all words,
all feelings of virtuous mood.*

*My truth is God - Man is
like an ornament showing
ups and downs-.*

*Bit by bit - of soil and stones -
the earth reveal it’s secrets to me
entirely body and soul.*

I am a naturalist...

I am humaine...

I understand life.

*Ecoute moi tre vien:
I am a man full of mysticism
I love the world - In and out-
soul and matter.*

*I am a true creation...
I evolve as God perfect design*

I am... I am... I am...

Ramon Andres Rodrigues

Author Voice (My Voice)
My Name is Ramon Andres Rodrigues

I am... I am a simple sixty-seven years
old man.

Some people call me “Poet”

I call myself Andres

Christian ED Update

Our January Sensory Service was held on January 3 with 35 people attending!

The Wise Men made a return visit to SCC on January 4 to celebrate the Epiphany. For epiphany, the students received their answers to their letters to Jesus.

January Sunday School classes are being held on January 4, 11 and 25 with January 18 being a day off for the holiday weekend.

The next Sensory Service will be on February 7 at 5:00 pm.

In February, Sunday School classes will be on February 1, 8 and 22. February 15 will be a day off due to February vacation. Sunday school classes on February 22, will be held in Globe Hall until Miss Mary can climb stairs following her hip replacement on February 11.

Studies for the Sunday School in January and February will be the 10 Commandments for younger student grades K-3 and Books of the Bible for the older students grades 4-7.