

ON THE COMMON

October 2025

From the Pastor's Desk...

BY PASTOR SEAN

SCRIPTURE: Mark 12:38-44
SERMON: "Your Two Cents"

Friends, I'd like to tell you a story about how worth and wealth are two different things – two different things that we often associate, intertwine with one another. No matter how you might howl at me from the pews, my dear congregants, you can't tell me you haven't done it before. You can't tell me you haven't met someone well-dressed, speaking smart, presenting well, covered in gold and silver, perhaps clothed in faith, and assumed that they – like the scribes of Jesus's time – weren't of a special worth on the basis of their outward wealth.

We've all done it. Because, in some sense, isn't wealth also worth? The dominant belief in our country, in our world, is that a person's capacity to earn money and spend money signifies that they belong to an upper echelon of society; that they have special qualities, perhaps, that those who aren't clearly wealthy don't have. That these people, in having found a way to accumulate more wealth than you or I, are better. Superior. More worthy to enter leadership, or rulership; they're smarter, quicker than us, on the basis of them having money we don't.

And as much as we'd like to pretend it isn't the case, this earthly tendency bleeds into the life of the church – the life of almost every and any church. No matter how hard we try, this earthliness – this love of money, and appreciation for those who have it – this tendency informs how we Christians 'do' church. Even we Christians, we people who are called to deny earthly standards, earthly distractions – we gravitate toward people who present well, at least by the standards of our world. Even if we know these folks have obtained their fortunes in underhanded ways, we must admit: they got their bag, one way or another. But enough about that, and onto my story. The story I'd like to tell you today is about a friend I met in seminary – a young person whose gifts were plain, whose talents were evident. Her name isn't Ruby, but Ruby's the name she asked me to use in telling her story to you today. Ruby was part of a big and successful family in the Midwest. But as we know, families can be big; branches of families, though they belong to the same tree, they all react differently to the world around them.

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Ruth Mills, Clerk
Jean Meo, Financial Clerk
Margaret Hanoian, Treasurer

CHURCH STAFF

Sean Amato, Minister
Donna Myers, Administrator
Joseph Godfrey, Music Director
Jill Boday, Handbell Choir
Patricia Renaud, Organist
Hope Paul, Nursery Attendant
Romeo Mendes, Sexton

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Michell Eskeli, Diaconate
Jim Robshaw, Hospitality
Bob Meo, Stewardship
Martha Hunt, Music
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Jim Robshaw
Stephen Wowk

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

Some branches don't get enough sun; some get too much rain on them. And that was the case for my friend.

Ruby's mother had left her home state for business opportunities with her husband in Florida – seeking greener pastures – but within a year, found herself a widow after her husband passed in a flood. But God's twists don't end there.

Several months later, Ruby was born; her mother hadn't known she'd been pregnant until just after her husband's death. For the next eight years, Ruby and her mother would go on to gravitate between couch-surfing and a shared room in an aunt's state housing – a place they technically weren't allowed to stay, but did so for most holidays. Ruby missed school most days, but benefited from the love of her teachers, who knew she was homeless and bent over backwards to help connect with her through monthly meetings and even inviting Ruby and her mother over for dinner.

By some fluke, Ruby would find her peace at church – a Baptist church, not a Congregationalist church, but none of us are perfect. She found her way into a youth group, breaking the guessing game of her transient summer life by going on church-sponsored mission trips. Ruby told me that those trips, those journeys into local cities to work at soup kitchens and senior centers, showed her the world outside her aunt's guest room – drove her to love people, to observe them, and to write about them. And so she wrote, and got good at writing and speaking; her church even let her preach. And that made her feel worthy, after so many years of feeling lesser-than.

Ruby's gifts would increase as others provided her with their gifts, too: she'd win some scholarships from her church and gain comfortable access – almost a full ride – to a nice state college. She was the first person from her branch of the family tree to attend college, having to learn and navigate the system by herself. But she did it, with the help of some elders at a church near the college – another Baptist church, but who am I to judge? She found solace with that community, too, after the passing of her mother during her senior year.

Ruby, born into poverty, orphaned at the age of 20, would graduate from college a year later. And then Ruby, convinced of her God-given gifts, would apply for and get into graduate school – and not just graduate school, but seminary. She was able to go because her old home church from Florida, which was in the process of closing, offered to pay her way through the program.

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

By the time I met Ruby, she was on the cusp of graduating from seminary. She spent at least two nights a week in a street ministry – a Baptist ministry, if you can believe it – where she cared for the needs of about fifty to sixty homeless individuals. For that reason, Ruby took classes only every other semester, focusing on her day job to make ends meet. She never stopped. She worked herself to the bone. And she shared her gifts with us newer seminarians, people who were woefully underprepared for our classwork and our ministry: to this day, she still texts me to make sure I'm sane. She made her gifts, the gifts she had only because she had been given so many gifts herself, she made those gifts available and plain.

And when she graduated a year before me, and became ordained a year before me, Ruby applied for a call at a "nice" Baptist church in the neighborhood where she spent years working with the homeless. Several of the congregants recognized her, and welcomed her, and made her feel comfortable. And she felt good – until the interview started. She had little experience managing money, they said, quoting a newspaper article about her life journey; their church needed someone to mind the coffers, someone who was more an administrator than a spiritual leader. Ruby knew that wasn't her. And even though she knew that, and they likely knew that, the interview continued. And continued. On the way out of the church, an elder pulled her aside and said: "Ruby, you've got plenty of gifts. Lots to give. But they're gifts for some other place and some other church."

What I'm about to tell you next, you might not believe. And that's fine. Just over a year later, that same church had fallen into disarray: they'd been unable to find a pastor, unwilling to explore younger candidates, unlikely to engage with those outside of their own denominational background. The church leaders battled amongst each other, pointing fingers until half of the congregation up and left – and with no pastor to mend them together, they stayed gone.

The church went into receivership and had to sell its building so as to pay off their remaining debts.

And when they sold their building, they sold it to an "outreach church" – and Pastor Ruby, or should I say Executive Director Ruby, was the one to receive the keys. Her work had made a splash, and the community outside the church had rallied around the work to which she devoted herself. The gentleman who handed Ruby those keys over was a member of the church's search committee, the one who had denied her readiness for ministry. And just after handing her the keys, this person – an older man – said: "Just a moment. Don't I know you from somewhere?" It turns out, he did know her from somewhere.

I tell you this story about my friend Ruby not to tug at your heartstrings, or let you in on a miracle, or to overemphasize how hard we are to work for God. No, I tell you this story so you might draw it into orbit with our scripture story today – a story in which Jesus watches a widow, one of ancient society's least-advantaged people, hands over to God her only two lepta – the literal pennies of Roman Palestine.

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

In Jesus' words, this woman is giving olon ton bion autes – she is not just giving her wages, but these mere pennies she likely earned begging, but olon ton bion autes, “her whole life,” all she had to live on, over to God.

I tell you this story today, because I'm still processing the loss of two of our congregants – two people who shared their gifts in different ways, two people who will never know the extent to which their gifts will go. I think about Bob Gentry, whose funeral was Friday – Bob Gentry, a man who served the congregation and institution of Smithfield Avenue Congregational Church for decades; a man who walked them through difficult times, did the difficult backstage work of the church alongside his wife Sharon and daughter Melanie, and helped turn the sorrow of closing their church into a sharing of gifts. Gifts meant to build up the church, gifts meant to foster new pastors – gifts meant to make all this keep going, so that others – like me, like Ruby – can share our gifts.

I think of our dear late Alan Whittemore, a gentleman who chose our community as his resting place – a good and generous man, who went out of his way to volunteer for church work at every single opportunity. A man who maintained our property, beautified our garden, and bestowed upon us his loving time.

I relate these things to you because, during these days, it might seem fruitless to consider your gifts. That with all of the unsteadiness of the world, we should hoard our gifts; prepare for whatever comes next. That sharing is just giving something away that you might need later. That your gifts aren't good enough to be shared, that the things you could bring to this world aren't worth seeing the light of day. And if you've been told these ideas, or you believe these ideas, I have a message for you: somebody lied.

Without kindness, without grace, without a ready willingness to give gifts, without a church that loves, my friend Ruby told me that she would have gone nowhere in life. That without a helping hand, without the gifts of others, she would have had no opportunity to magnify her own gifts.

Friends, consider this: your two cents, your two lepta, have worth beyond measure. The little gifts you bring to this place, to one another, will change lives. I swear it, I promise it. So share, my friends. For the love of God, hear the story of Ruby – a woman who saves lives, who pastors to the soul and body, who can only be a pastor because people took a chance on her. Invested in her. And loved her. So share your gifts, my friends. Amen.

N. Smithfield Food Pantry October

For the month of **October**
Food Pantry hours are:

Saturday 10/18 @ 10:00am
Tuesday 10/21 @ 5:30pm
Saturday 10/25 @ 10:00am
Tuesday 10/28 @ 5:30pm

This month we are asking
for donations of baked
beans, canned pasta and
canned chicken or tuna.





Autumn - “Tag Day”

BY RICK STELLE,
PROPERTIES CHAIRPERSON

This Autumn we are working on de-cluttering our Church while making sure that we save our history. It’s time to clear up and organize our limited storage spaces. There are so many things that we can no longer use and sometimes that makes it difficult to find the things we need.

On Saturday, **October 18th**, from 10:00am to 3:00pm, there will be an all committee “Tag Day” to separate the treasures from the trash. The final clean church day will be November 1st when we will have a dumpster available.

If you belong to a committee, please let your chairperson know if you can help. If you don’t belong to a committee this is a great time to volunteer. You will get to know more about our church and the people that keep it going and hopefully you will find a committee to join where you can use your talents (or learn new ones) to help make our church stronger.

Thank you in advance,

Open and Affirming Group Moving Forward

BY DARLENE MAGAW

A group of Slatersville UCC members and friends have been meeting informally for a few months to further identify and explore how our Church can live into our UCC Open and Affirming covenant. We’re looking forward to adding our energies and voices in collaboration with other church committees and our community.

In September, this group voted to approach our Church Council in order to recognize this group as a standing church committee. Bonnie Drolet has agreed to be our Interim Group Chairperson until this matter can be approved at our annual church meeting in January. Jim Robshaw will be her backup during this interim period.

Our group is open to all who are interested in how to better welcome and affirm marginalized people into the full life and ministry of our church. We have been meeting after worship during coffee hour in the area between the sanctuary and Globe Hall.

Missions Moment

BY ALISON PEIRCE

As our community grapples with the many pressures of today’s society, our thoughts turned to those experiencing difficult times. For September’s Missions giving, the committee chose to donate \$500 to **Community Care Alliance**. Community Care Alliance’s mission is to support individuals and families of all backgrounds in their efforts to meet economic, social, and emotional challenges and enhance their well-being.

It is hard to think about people in dire straits, but when people are supported and empowered with dignity, everyone benefits and our community thrives. Community Care Alliance offers over 50 programs, such as basic-needs assistance, counseling, treatment, support services, residential programs for individuals and families impacted by serious mental illness and addiction, financial literacy, vocational training, to name just a few.

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Come Fill a Bag on October 26, 2025!

BY ALISON PEIRCE

Grab your cup of coffee and come fill a Blessing Bag directly after church during Coffee Hour on **October 26, 2025**. What is a **Blessing Bag**? If you're new to a church, it is a continuing ministry our congregation has undertaken to provide a bag of basic essentials to those in need in our community. After collecting the donated items listed below, we will gather as a church family on October 26th and assemble the bags, including an encouragement card, which will then be given out with caring to those without shelter this fall.

What can you do to help? Between now and October 26th, you can shop for **INDIVIDUALLY WRAPPED FOOD ITEMS** and **TRAVEL-SIZED TOILETRIES**. We will have slips for you to pick up during coffee hour beginning on September 7th. Pick a slip (or two or three) with the items you'd like to shop for. Once you have purchased your supplies, you can drop them off at the church beginning on September 14th and ending on October 12th. There will be a box labeled BLESSING BAGS in Globe Hall. We hope to gather enough supplies to make at least 50 bags. Our congregation is always so generous, and we are looking forward to continuing our message of giving and kindness through this service project. Thank you so much!

Missions Moment (Cont.)...

Community Care Alliance is a non-profit 501C (3) and has over 130 years of experience working to strengthen families, individuals and the community in Northern Rhode Island.

Our **Blessing Bag donation collection** continues, so don't forget to grab a donation slip during Coffee Hour. Please have your donations returned by **October 12th**, then join us on **October 26th** as we gather during Coffee Hour to assemble 50 bags to give to those in our community in need.

Suggestions for Shopping:

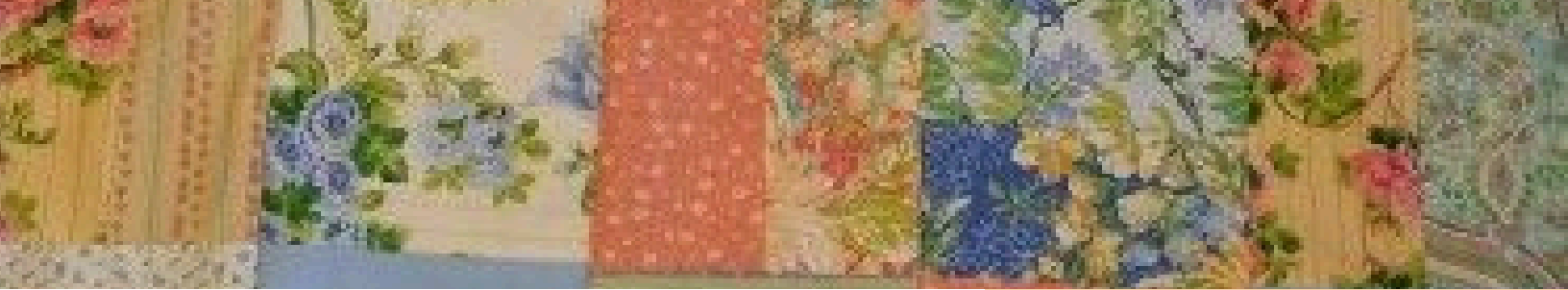
INDIVIDUALLY-WRAPPED FOOD ITEMS

- *Box of Granola bars
- *Box of *Energy bars
- *Box of Trail mix bags
- *Tuna/chicken pouches
- *Beef jerky
- *Raisins
- *Fruit cups

TRAVEL-SIZED TOILETRIES

- *Toothpaste/Mouthwash
- *Deodorant
- *Small Bars of Soap Combs
- *Bandaid
- *Chapstick





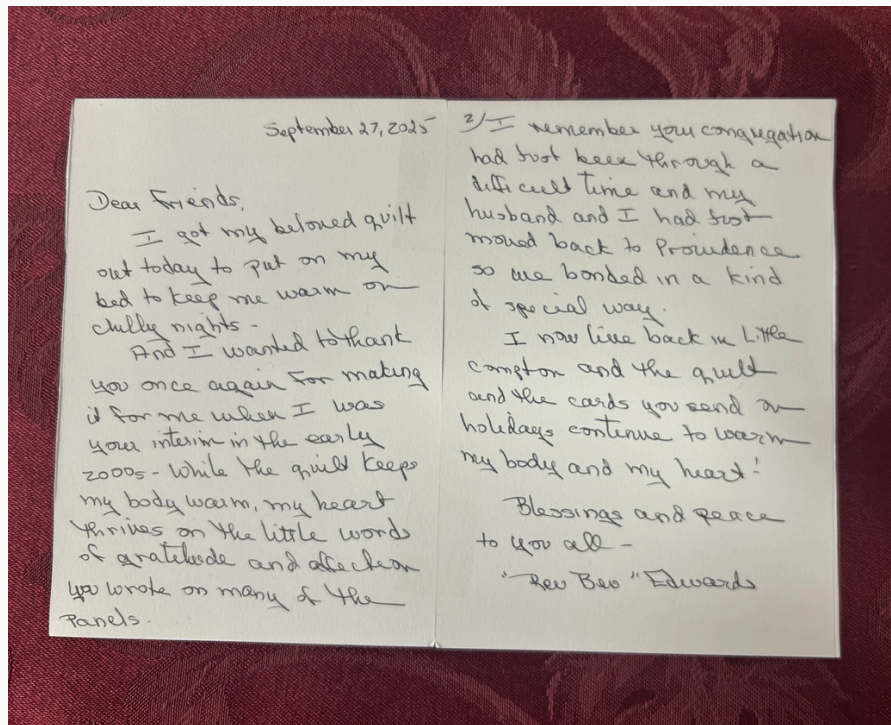
Thank You from Rev. Bev

Slatersville Congregational Church recently received a Thank You Note from one of our Beloved Former Interim Pastors, Reverend Beverly Edwards.

The good folks of SCC presented her with a quilt - hand sown with love and special message from her time with us.

She still cherishes the quilt as well as the cards and notes she still receives from people in the congregation.

Enjoy her note below...



Mental Health Moment

BY JAN GOODRICH

Jan was a Psychiatric Registered Nurse and group leader who taught Mental Health Skills for daily life.

Yesterday I was booking a night at a motel. I made two mistakes which required me to make three phone calls to the motel and two Emails to Expedia to fix them. It was very embarrassing! Then I broke a glass and everything else just seemed to go wrong. I finally decided to take a rest just to break the cycle of making mistakes.

While I was resting and thinking, I realized that I am just an average person. We all make many mistakes every day. I sometimes want to be exceptional ... to show everyone how capable I am; but I must accept that I am human like everyone else, so I got up and faced the day and said to myself, "Good for me for having the courage to make mistakes and the willingness to bear life's discomforts!" Then I felt good about accepting my humanness and was able to enjoy my evening and thank God for the great life I have!



Pumpkin Fest 2025 - Highlights

BY JEAN MEO

Pumpkin Fest 2025 was a fabulous success for a variety of reasons. Not only was it a gorgeous day, which brought out crowds of people, but it was the largest group of vendors and activities ever – 182 different locations. It was also a chance to spotlight our church and our new minister, Rev. Sean, as he worked with us setting up the event early in the morning and had a chance to visit many booths as well as members of the community. The apple dumplings were a hit as usual and we sold out of the 48 pizzas we ordered.

The Apple Dumpling Gang on Friday peeled and cored apples, rolled and wrapped dough, had a great time in fellowship. Those who worked in our booth on Saturday were a huge help as we were kept busy dishing ice cream for sundaes and dumplings, adding caramel sauce and selling pizzas. The efforts of everyone make such a difference in our success, and we thank one and all for being there with smiles!

It was a great day, not only for the \$1300 we raised but more so for the community involvement and outreach. Slatersville Congregational Church was the only church represented, a sign that we are alive and well and thriving!

