

GRACE NOTES

Newsletter of Grace Congregational United Church of Christ, an Open and Affirming Congregation

Natural Church Development continues to grow at Grace Church

To the casual observer it might seem that Grace Church took a break from its redevelopment efforts and Natural Church Development during Advent. I would argue that exactly the opposite is true. The Advent Season provided our faith community the opportunity to put the theory of Natural Church Development into practice, at least on a small scale.

What do I mean by that? You may recall that Natural Church Development focuses on eight quality characteristics of healthy churches: Empowering Leadership, Gift-based Ministry, Passionate Spirituality, Effective Structures, Inspiring Worship, Holistic Small Groups, Need-oriented Evangelism, and Loving Relationships. While it is possible to tie the Advent experience to several of these characteristics, I am going to focus on Inspiring Worship and Gift-based Ministry.

“Attending an inspiring worship service is fun,” says Christian Schwartz, the architect of Natural Church Development, who identified “Inspiring Worship” as one of the eight quality characteristics of a healthy church. By that measure and others, many people found the creative worship services in advent to be inspiring in some way. We heard several comments like “It made me look at things in a different way,” “I wasn’t bored,” or “I can’t wait to find out what happens next.” The services held the attention of people of all ages and involved a variety of people in the church in one way or another.

Gift-based ministry, another quality characteristic of a healthy church, also was featured in the development of the Advent worship services and Live Nativity. Have you ever wondered what “gift-based ministry” would look actually like once we finished with all those surveys? Here is a preview.

The worship planning team was intentional in taking a gift-based

Continued on page six

February 8 Conversation

After church on Sunday, February 8, Central Council is hosting a second time of coffee and conversation. This is another in our series of congregational conversations where we all can listen to each other. In conversation, we also open up space for the voice of God.

Gifts Counseling is the Next Step

Many of us have completed the first few steps of building gifts-based ministry. We took a copy of *The 3 Colors of Ministry*. We read at least some of the book. We completed the Three Color Gifts Test (that’s the 180 item questionnaire in the book). Many of us had two people who know us well complete the “third party questionnaire.” Then we scored all those questionnaires and figured out our top three to five “manifest” spiritual gifts and three to five “latent” spiritual gifts. That’s been something of a resting place for this initiative.

The next step is called Gifts Counseling. What we’re going to do is to use a structured interview to further understand the results of the questionnaires.

Continued on page six

Grace Notes

Volume 11, Number 2

February 2009

- From the Pastor2
- Transportation Ministry2
- Church Calendar3
- Congregational Meeting.....3
- Ministries.....4-6
- Terri Taylor/In Care.....6

Note From the Pastor

Dear Ones,

Our God is visible, I believe, in the powerful operations of biology that we describe in the Theory of Evolution. Nature favors difference, with each organism striving to find a niche in which to thrive. Each species, over time, survives in its niche or a new one by favorable mutations, as evolution pushes creation toward greater differentiation. In the difference is the power and resilience of nature. Look into the variety of things that grow and swim, crawl and fly, slither and walk on earth! Look and see the face of God who loves each difference and values the complexity of life.

In our congregational life, we lift up differences among us in various ways. One primary way is our Open and Affirming statement of inclusion. Have you read it recently? Here it is.

We believe that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people share with all others that worth that comes from being unique individuals created by God. We welcome lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people as members and participants of Grace Church through affirmation of faith. As members of the Body of Christ and of Grace Church, lesbian, gay bisexual, and transgender people are expected and encouraged to share in liturgy, life, all levels of employment, and leadership of the congregation.

We recognize that our openness must be placed so that all can see and that our affirmation requires affirmative steps.

That's a pretty good statement! For some of us, reading those words, it is a great statement. It stands against the great force of the way things were and insists on altering the flow of history.

Close in our hearts and close to the heart of Grace Church to this welcome is the unstated welcome we extend to people of different backgrounds, different apparent race, different faith journeys, different wealth, different ability, different age, different gender, different health. We have not felt the need to state it, perhaps, because worshipping together on a Sunday morning shows us to ourselves and we are diverse! (Note: We will consider being explicit, one of these days, for the same reason that it was and is to be explicit in our ONA statement.)

Can I tell you how you each make my heart sing when I see you? Can I reveal that seeing us in all our diversity is what makes me jump up so energetically at the start of every worship service and burst with musical praise?

Now we are on a great venture of redevelopment. We have not called it reinvention and there is a reason. We are not going to stop being Grace Church. We are hoping to learn some new ways of being who we truly are. That's why the new way of exploring our spiritual gifts starts with who we tell ourselves we are. God is the primary source of who we are. Then we look to ourselves in a creative, fresh way to know ourselves "again for the first time." At the same time, we will look outward to see who we are in the midst of our community. What needs to we exist to serve?

What will serve us best as we continue to use these questions to form ourselves will look different, in some ways, from what Grace looked like before. I suggest to you that Grace never looked any particular way before. Grace was always a changing institution with new programs, with adjustments to new financial realities, with new possibilities, and with new people. That's the history I read when I review where Grace has been. Grace has been different in different ages.

In the difference is the power and resilience of one of God's churches.

Peace and Blessing,
Brad

Give a church goer a lift!



There are several church members who would like to come to church on Sunday mornings, but are unable to drive. Sometimes they can get to church - but not back - and vice versa.

If you can help out with transportation (even one Sunday a month), speak to Pastor Brad or send an e-mail to [Kab in the office - office@gracechurchucc.org](mailto:Kab@gracechurchucc.org)

No one should miss church because they can't get a ride.

Gift Counseling

Continued from page one

I (Brad) am going to serve, at least initially, as your “gifts counselor.” The structured interview will help you to interpret the findings about your spiritual gifts. Together, we’ll consider how these show up in your life. We’ll explore what the results can mean for your self-understanding. We’ll remember how you have been able to see your spiritual gifts in your work at church. We’ll make sure the results make sense. We’ll imagine what opportunities you could pursue to live more fully with your spiritual gifts and share them in community, i.e., with your family/friends, in church, and in the wider community.

This should be an interesting time. It will take us awhile to get through everybody, of course. **I invite you to invite me to a gifts counseling meeting. You can take the initiative on this, if you like. Or, you can wait for my call (eagerly, no doubt!)**

Once we have conferred about your spiritual gifts, you can decide which of your results you want to share with others. My hope is that we are living in a community of trust and that you will want to share all your found gifts with the rest of Grace church.

Some of you have not moved through the process to the point of identifying your manifest and latent spiritual gifts. The Gifts-based Ministry Task Team again invites you to contact any one of us to encourage and to support you in moving ahead. We are: Nancy Brown, Linda Hilliard, Terri Taylor, and Pastor Brad.

Congregational Meeting held on January 25

Grace Church’s congregational meeting was held after church on Sunday, January 25. The Stewards presented the 2009 budget proposal, which was passed unanimously.

There was a presentation about Natural Church Development and Pastor Brad announced that Terri Taylor is now “In Care” with the Central Association (see article on page one).

Eleanor Crawford has stepped down as clerk after seven years. Lynn Burdett has agreed to assume the position.

Ruth and Frank Carney have agreed to stay on Deacons and Stewards, respectively, for another six months - until June 2009. Eleanor Crawford and Mary Memmott have stepped down from the Missions Ministry Team; however, remain committed to Mission ministries.



In Case of Weather Cancellation

Grace Church is connected to WCVB, Channel 5. If a service or event needs to be cancelled because of weather, tune to Channel 5 for our cancellation listing.

Church calendar - February

February 1	10:00 AM Noon	Worship Children to sing in Worcester	February 11	11:30 AM	Grace Women United Soup Luncheon
February 2	1:00 PM	Worship Planning	February 15	10:00 AM	Worship
February 3	7:30 PM	Central Council	February 16	1:00 PM	Worship Planning
February 7	8:00 AM	Men’s Group 	February 18	7:30 PM	Stewards
February 8	10:00 AM 11:30 AM	Worship Coffee and Conversation	February 22	10:00 AM	Worship
February 9	1:00 PM 7:00 PM 7:30 PM	Worship Planning Deacons Women’s Lectio	February 23	1:00 PM	Worship Planning
			February 25	Ash Wednesday 10:00 AM 5:00 PM 7:00 PM	Book Club Eat at Eagles Ash Wednesday Service 

Ministries

Missions

Eleanor Crawford,
Chair
Mary Memmott
*mission@
gracechurchucc.
org*



Mission

“Cans” for Communion -- Special Request for Feb. 1

It's winter cold and flu season -- this month we are collecting personal-sized containers of hand sanitizer for the homeless members of Worcester Fellowship church. NEW men's socks are also still very welcome. We will not be collecting cans this month as the Metrowest Harvest pantry transitions to a new space.

Trip to Worcester – Feb. 1

Some of the Grace church children have been practicing a song to sing at the Worcester Fellowship outdoor service at 1 p.m., on Sunday, Feb. 1. All are welcome to join us, whether you'd like to sing or not. Each of our last two visits to Worcester Fellowship have been uplifting and energizing to those who made the trek – even in the winter cold – if you'd like to come along and see for yourself please speak to Mary Memmott or Terri Taylor. We will car-pool immediately after church and most likely stop for a brief lunch along the way.



Christian Education

Christian Ed.

Daleen Perkins
Ronda Yeomans
*christianed@
gracechurchucc.org*

Can you lend a hand as a teacher or classroom assistant over the next several months? Christian Education is looking for volunteers to fill in the February, March and April teaching schedules. Speak to Ronda or Daleen if you can donate a Sunday or two to work with the children. It's a lot of fun and your assistance is much appreciated by not only Daleen and Ronda, but also by the children.

Hot Cobblers and a “Hot” Book – Earth-Care Education Series Continues

All are invited to join us at Edwards Church on the evening of Tuesday, Feb. 10th, to discuss the book *Hot, Flat, and Crowded*, by Thomas Friedman. We will meet at 7 p.m. for dessert (cobblers!) and coffee/tea/cocoa, followed by a book discussion from 7:30-8:30 p.m. Child-care is available. Copies of the book are still available to borrow. Join us for a lively discussion about this fascinating book on the environmental crisis and how America could respond in a positive way -- with good company and warm desserts.

Save the Date – Saturday, March 21 – “Spring Clean Your Carbon Footprint”

What's a carbon footprint anyway? What can you do to make yours smaller, help the planet, and save \$ in the process? Join us from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. on Saturday, March 21 for another event in the Earth Care Education Series, this time at Grace Church. We promise an informative and interesting morning for all ages – so save the date!

Grace Women United

GWU will have its soup luncheon on Wednesday February 11. Please come and join us for a delicious lunch and conversation. We will meet at 11:30 at the church.



Book Club

The Book Club will meet on Wednesday, February 25 at 10AM.

Ministries

Deacon
Ruth Carney, Chair
George Tynes
Karolyne White

deacons@
gracechurchucc.
org

Stewards
Jean Burr, Chair
Frank Carney
Judy Sebastian
Tim Taylor

stewards@
gracechurchucc.org

TAX NEWS:

(See your tax person for more details.)

For those over 70-1/2: 1. Required mandatory distributions from IRAs are waived for 2009. Any voluntary distributions will still be taxable under the prior rules. 2. Contributions to churches and other qualifying charities that are made directly from the trustee to the organization avoid federal taxation, effective for 2008 and 2009. (Can not also deduct it on Schedule A.)

Taxpayers may exclude income from the discharge of debt on a principal residence, through a short sale, mortgage restructuring or debt forgiven in connection with a foreclosure. This applies to transactions in 2007, 2008 and 2009.

If planning to include a charity in one's will, consider making that charity a beneficiary of a percentage of your traditional IRA. The amount of your distribution will avoid federal taxation.

A new credit of up to \$7,500 is now available to first-time homebuyers.

Deacons

People of Grace,

We hope you have been able to stay safe and warm during this stormy and blustery January.

- Our **Blue Jean Sunday** on January 11, 2009 was on one of those stormy days. A very gracious thank you goes out to all who made it to church and stayed to put the decorations that were inside the building away. We decided that we would wait until the weather improves to put the outside decorations away. They had entirely too much snow and ice on them to be able

Stewards

- We have voted to expand the number of parking spaces rented to college students from 9 to 15. Although we acknowledge that a few glitches occurred during recent snow storms, we felt that it was a good decision. The rented spaces now come around the corner facing the lawn area.
- We have not renewed the cleaning service as of February and volunteers will be needed to clean the church. Anyone willing to help should speak to one of the Stewards.



If you would like to provide flowers for the altar, please be in touch with Ruth Carney. If you wish to have her order flowers from our florist, the current price is \$35.00.

to pack them away in the attic.

- Please put February 25 at 7 PM on your calendar. Our **Ash Wednesday Worship Service** will be on the 25th. The supper at the Eagles will be at 5 PM to give you plenty of time to go to dinner and also to be able to make the 7 PM service.

- Please don't forget if we need to **cancel worship** or any other event for weather related reasons, we are connected with The Boston Channel, so tune to WCRB Channel 5 for the listing. In addition to this list, there would also be an email sent out.

Every Sunday, things get done before, during and after worship. How would you like to volunteer to be a lay reader, usher, greet or to prepare and serve coffee for the fellowship time after worship on Sunday? (Thank you to all who have signed up or just pitched in.) Please take a moment to sign up for one of these opportunities. You will find the sign up sheets on the new bulletin board in our fellowship area. There are many, many openings!

Please do not forget that we care about your wellbeing and want to walk with you celebrating your joys, holding you in your sorrows, and just being there when you need us. God is with us and among us. God does and will provide.

May you always feel God's blessings,

The Deacon Ministry Team

Natural Church Development

Continued from page one

approach during Advent, and did so in a very intentional way. Pastor Brad combined his spiritual gifts for artistic creativity and craftsmanship with those of the Taylor family to create a backdrop for worship that was simply spectacular. Similarly, Walter Brown used similar gifts in creating the amazing set for the Live Nativity. On the worship planning team, Eleanor Crawford epitomized the spiritual gift of service, which is defined as having an eye for what needs to be done and taking care of it. Terri Taylor and Susan Minor harnessed the musical gifts of adults and children in providing some fabulous musical offerings during the service. Who even knew our church had so much dramatic talent just waiting to be tapped? Who knew I could write a dramatic script? Not me! I could say more, but you get the idea.

Here are two analogies you can use to imagine Natural Church Development's relationship to church ministry when it is working. It is like oxygen is to breathing. Oxygen is absolutely essential to keep a person healthy, and it is used on a constant basis. Yet, the person is unlikely to notice it or think about it much, even though they rely on it for survival. Natural Church Development is also like the floor under your feet. You might not give it much attention, but it provides the foundation for all that you do.

Peace. Linda Dunbrack

Terri Taylor accepted for In Care

In May, our Initial In Care Team and Central Council accepted Terri Taylor "in care" of Grace Congregational United Church of Christ. Terri is pursuing a Master of Divinity degree at Andover Newton Theological School. An ongoing effort to support Terri's path toward ordained ministry is now our responsibility as Grace Church. One form of that support will be the In Care Task Team, a team that will meet with Terri periodically in a semi-formal way, cultivate one-on-one support for Terri and her family, and provide energy to link all of us to Terri's ongoing call. That team will also accompany Terri to meetings with Andover Newton, the Central Association Committee on the Ministry, and any other appropriate consultations.

Also, Pastor Brad will serve as Terri's Ministerial Advisor.

In November, the Committee on Ministry that serves us and the whole Central Association held an "initial interview" with Terri. This interview responded to Terri's and Grace Church's formal request to the Committee to take Terri "into discernment," which is to say, into a progressive conversation for the purpose of figuring out with Terri

- the nature of the call to ordained ministry that she has felt and begun to describe,
- whether that call comes from the Holy Spirit,
- whether Terri has the abilities, experience, and training to support the call,
- and how Terri can best develop herself in the next few years.

Members of Grace Church's In

Grace Congregational, UCC
PO Box 1481
76 Salem End Road
Framingham, MA 01702
508-872-3342
www.gracechurchucc.org
www.macucc.org (Mass Conf.)
www.ucc.org (UCC)

Pastor: Brad Watters
pastor@gracechurchucc.org

Moderator: Linda Hilliard
moderator@gracechurchucc.org

Christian Education:
Ronda Yeomans
christianed@gracechurchucc.org

Deacons: Ruth Carney
deacon@gracechurchucc.org

Stewards: Jean Burr
steward@gracechurchucc.org

Members at Large: Terri Taylor
atlarge@gracechurchucc.org

Office Administrator:
Kab Rabinowitz
office@gracechurchucc.org

Music Director: Susan Minor
musicdirector@gracechurchucc.org

Missionary in Indonesia:
Susan Frans
sefrans@kupang.wasantara.net.id

Care Task Team accompanied Terri to this interview. Following the interview, the Committee informed Terri that they have agreed to take her into discernment!

So, to sum up, Terri is "in care" with all of us at Grace Church. She is enrolled in the Masters of Divinity program at Andover Newton. The Committee on Ministry of the Central Association of the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ has, on behalf of the whole association, taken Terri into the discernment process for those seeking ordination.

May all of us at Grace, "mother of ministers," Rejoice, Rejoice, Rejoice, Give Thanks, and Sing!