

GRACE NOTES

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

Congregational conversation planned for January 15

Editor's note: The following letter was sent to the Grace Church family on December 24 from the Central Council. It announces a congregational conversation on Sunday, January 15 (Snow date: January 22). All Grace Church members and friends are strongly urged to participate in this meeting.

As we sit in this season of waiting and anticipation, we sit too on the edge of Grace's future. We are about to embark on the construction of a new building and on a search for a new pastor. We struggle with our financial security and with our relationships with one another. Truth be told, the commitment we all expressed a year ago to stay together no matter what appears to be in question again. We are it seems at a critical point in the determination of Grace's future,

perhaps even more so than a year ago when all seemed so unclear.

As your chosen leadership we will host a congregational conversation on Sunday January 15, 2006 following a brief worship service. The morning will begin at 10:00 am and will end by 1:00 pm. It is our hope that this conversation will be an opportunity to clear the air, be honest with one another, and set the stage for any future action taken. The conversation is open to all who care about Grace's future.

If you intend to be a part of Grace's future, we expect that you will make every effort to attend and participate in this important meeting. We ask that you take the next few weeks to reflect on what Grace means to you and what you need from

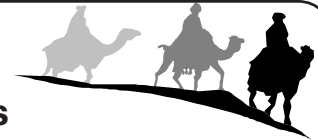
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Grace Notes

Volume 8, Number 1

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Let's Celebrate!

At 10 AM on Sunday, January 8, the congregations of Edwards, Plymouth and Grace will gather at Edwards Church for our annual combined service in celebration of Epiphany. We have a moving service planned which will include all the clergy and program staff of the three churches. The choir from the three congregations will sing the morning anthem together. Remember, there is no worship at 73 Union Avenue on January 8 --please join us at Edwards Church in Saxonville at 10 AM.

Newbury Street Update

Here's an update on what's happening at Newbury Street.

- Architect Chris Walsh is currently refining the designs for the Newbury Street property. This phase of development can take more than a month. As the design is being finalized, Walsh has been contacting several

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The Light shines in the darkness

We need to recover a sense of proportion which helps us understand how truly rich we are compared to the majority of the world around us.

We need to see that as Christians, we are called to care about others before ourselves, to understand ourselves as messengers of love, not preservers of our own expectations.

For me, there's always a kind of let-down after the holiday season. I have come to expect it. I take comfort in knowing I can live through it. But this year, the let-down came between Thanksgiving and Christmas. As we prepared for Christmas, bought gifts, mailed cards and decorated our tree, I was fighting a darkness, a grief that came to my husband and me in waves: First the death of a friend. A few days later, the death of our 40 year old next door neighbor, who is survived by his wife and 5 year old son. Heart problems for David's uncle, whose wife suffers from Alzheimer's Disease. The church of a pastor friend in New Hampshire was broken into and ransacked – the reasons still unclear. Then we learned that the last church Dave served in the Midwest, the sanctuary where we baptized Sabrina and Parker and celebrated their homecomings burned to the ground two weeks before Christmas. It seemed to me for a few days that the world was filled with darkness. To be perfectly honest with you, ten days before Christmas I just wanted to crawl into a hole somewhere and shield myself from the sadness of all these events which had touched our lives.

But I didn't. I didn't because I couldn't. I just kept going and trying to cope and as I did I became newly sensitive to the truly minor things we often treat as life-altering. I gained a perspective that said, "In light of the loss and destruction affecting people I love, the question of which hymnal we use during Advent or whether the Advent Candles are this shade of blue or that shade of purple are virtually meaningless." You have to admit that we often occupy ourselves with the minutia of church life while not engaging the really life-changing, world-transforming issues swirling around us. We fight over who gets credit for what, and we get tied up in knots about the way the bulletin is organized

or printed or folded, when there are people in pain and need all around us whom we neglect. We anguish over stone or white clapboard while our country continues to sacrifice money and lives on an altar of national pride and dominance. We push our personal agendas to get what we want at church, and much less frequently lift a hand to create what God wants in the world. What I could see in those days were these words from the Gospel of John, : **"And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and humanity loved darkness rather than light..." (John 3: 19)**

I looked at all this through my own lense of grief and sadness and I realized that what you and I need is a monumental shift in perspective. The church can no longer afford to be so preoccupied with its own survival that we forget how much we really do have individually and collectively. We need to recover a sense of proportion which helps us understand how truly rich we are compared to the majority of the world around us. We need to get a grip on our personal issues and set them aside in order to develop ministries which reach out to those who are grieving, suffering, struggling in any way. We need to see that as Christians, we are called to care about others before ourselves, to understand ourselves as messengers of love, not preservers of our own expectations.

Ultimately, the message of Christmas, has once again wound its way into my sad heart. We have celebrated with the children and we have read the stories and sang the carols and, although it was hard, I was finally able to hear the Christmas angels singing, "Because of the Christmas child, you are not alone. You are loved no matter what." My focus switched. The affirmation which rang in my ears then were these words we read

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'Tis the season to not forget to say thank you!

Linda Hilliard,
Moderator

It's impossible to name everyone. If you have been missed, know that you are still appreciated.

Do you say thank you often enough? Oh sure, when you arrive at church someone holds the Pearl Street door and you say "thanks." Or during coffee hour, someone passes you the cream and gets an automatic "thank you." But do you truly express your appreciation to other church members who are consistently working hard to make our church experience so rewarding?

Here are a few thank yous we should all echo:

- Thank you to Missions not only for your work with the Pathway Shelter holiday collection, but for taking the time to make holiday cards for our homebound members. ... and for organizing the SMOC canned goods drive and coordinating Turning Point.
- Thanks to all the Christian Education members who created the fabulous Children's service on Dec. 18. We appreciate the countless hours in rehearsals, set design, costumes and so on.
- Thanks also to CE for our Sunday School and nursery programs. CE is a crown jewel of programs - just look at all our enthusiastic youngsters as an example.
- Thanks to Music for not only our wonderful Praise music but also carolling for our homebound members last weekend.
- Thanks to the Deacons for their ministry among us. Our Sunday morning services enrich us all.
- Thanks to Stewards for keeping us on track financially. And thanks for arriving early on Sundays to open the church and making sure we're welcoming.
- Thanks to the hard working Building Task team, Dream team and Construction team for the hours they have spent on Union Avenue and imagining our new home on Newbury Street.
- Thank you to the Circle 13 ladies for every bake sale, craft sale, holiday event, and yard sale - and all those years with the thrift shop. Through hard work, you have not only created fellowship, but brought in needed money for the church.
- Thank you to the mail ladies who can be counted on for all our mailings. And thank you to those who step up occasionally and do mailings when the ladies are not available.
- Thank you to our Sunday School teachers and our nursery volunteers. Your gifts to our children are immeasurable.

• And special thanks to our children - who open our eyes to new possibilities.

And to name a few names:

- Thank you Reverend Gretchen for your pastoral guidance, your patience and your hard work. And thank you for caring so much.
- Thank you Susan Minor (and the choir) for your wonderful gift of music.
- Thank you Reverend Donna for your role on CE - and also for going above and beyond when Gretchen was ill.
- Thanks to Kab who - although new to us - has so capably and agreeably stepped in to run our office.
- Thank you to Marilyn and Tom Durgin (and their assistants) who do the fellowship coffee.
- Thanks to Grace Kimball, our historian and archivist, who helps us remember our past as we plan our future.

Grace Church Congregational Meeting

Sunday, January 29 • 11:30 p.m.

A light lunch will be served and childcare provided.
A call letter with agenda items will be sent out
two weeks before the meeting.

*Note: This meeting is separate from the January 15
congregational conversation meeting.*

Building Update *Continued from page one*

contractors, inviting them to submit bids. The Construction Team expects to meet the contractors and receive bids in January.

- After numerous meetings throughout the fall, the Dream Team has completed it's task. They met with the architect, expressed their views on what Grace Church needs for a new home, and have recommended a design to the Central Council, which was presented to the congregation. A job well done- thank you!

The task of working with the architect to select a contractor and then monitor actual construction now goes to the Construction team (Walter Brown, Frank Carney, Al McGuirk, Tim Taylor, Brian Winsor). Throughout the process that lies ahead, the Central Council will be kept updated will receive recommendations.

- After a lengthy period, NStar and the town have shut off all utilities to the building. With that completed, Blades Construction is now working to get the town permits and will then demolish the building. Meanwhile, the Framingham Fire Department has been using the building for training purposes. The training currently involves inside search and rescue. Once the town permits are received, the Fire dept. will do training that impacts the structure.

Pastor's Paragraph

Continued from page two

at the very beginning of John's Gospel about the Christ: **"The Light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5)**. This is the message I believe God longs for us to hear.

In this blessed New Year, may the light of Christ, which still shines bright, sustain and inspire us as individuals and as a community.

Peace in the name of the newborn Savior,
Reverend Gretchen.



Support the new, improved Grace Church web page

Grace Church is going to (finally) update it's website (that would be our old website that still lists the thrift shop hours and staff members from four years ago.) Our new and improved site will talk about who we are, plans for our future - and will even show renderings of the new building (and, later, construction photos). And . . . it will be updated regularly!

That's where Grace Church members can help - by sponsoring the webpage or the monthly updates for as little as \$30. If you like, you may even be listed on the page as a sponsor (in small, tasteful type).

Why a web page? As Grace moved forward, it is important that we reach out to the community. A well-designed and well-written webpage is one of several ways to promote our church. Many non-churched people or those new to an area, church shop via websites. An inviting website is an invitation to visit us.

Refer web page content questions to Linda Hilliard and send those sponsor checks to Nancy Brown.

Ministry Teams

CEMT

Rev. Donna Tetreault,
CE Minister
Clair Ball
Laura Buck
Joanne Larkins
Robin Leone O'Brien
Daleen Perkins
Lynn Rodriguez
Ronda Yeomans

**THE PRESENT
FUTURE Book
Study continues
on Sunday,
January 22 at 9
AM. Whether or
not you have read
the book, I think
you will get a lot
out of the
conversation.
Why not come
and see what
ideas could catch
your
imagination?**

Rev. Gretchen

Stewards

Dianne Belloli, Chair
Carl Buck
Lynn Burdett
Frank Carney
Judy Sebastian
Tim Taylor

Christian Education

10 a.m. Sunday School Schedule Change

Due to the New Year holiday, the Epiphany service at Edwards Church and the Jan. 15 church meeting there will not be Sunday School until Jan 22. Childcare will be available on Jan. 15 for all children and more specific information will be coming out soon.

When we resume Sunday School on Jan 22, we will be returning to a 10 a.m. start time so that worship and Sunday School share the hour. This decision has come from unexpected challenges that have happened over the past few months and has led the Christian Education Ministry Team to a new structure. On the first Sunday of the month, we will all gather for family worship and to celebrate Communion. On the other Sundays the children will spend the hour downstairs, share in a small worship together, and then have class lessons, activities and stories. This new format addresses many concerns that have been raised, and is also an invitation for members of the congregation to join us as a children's worship leader or story teller. New plans for Adult Education opportunities are being explored.

A Children's Christmas Service

The children led a wonderful, creative, enthusiastic and insightful Christmas worship service on Dec. 18. Animals in the stable, shepherds in the field, angels in the sky, and a crowd (including the adult Jesus!) at the Bethlehem Inn and Pub brought the Christmas story to life. Their unique and creative energy was a gift and blessing to all of us!

Stuffed Friends for children along the Gulf Coast

On Sunday, Dec. 11 we joined with many other churches as we collected and blessed over 70 teddy bears and stuffed animals and sent them to the Lisa Mains Saley Foundation for Kids, LLC, a Louisiana Non-Profit Corporation that held Christmas parties for children of the gulf coast. The children who endured incredible losses from Hurricane Katrina and the aftermath needed not only a hug (a bear or other stuffed friend) but also just a joyous good time. Local community and businesses supplied all the necessary elements such as cakes, ice cream, treats, balloons, clowns, face painting, music, games and entertainment.



Stewards

Budgets

We would like every Ministry Team to get their very trimmed down budgets to Walter Brown as soon as possible. We are trying to save as much monies as we can and have come up with some ideas as to how to keep a handle on the Ministry Teams spending. We will have more information for you at the next Central Council meeting.

Pledge cards

We would like to ask all those who have not yet sent in their pledge cards to do so by the 17th of January. We want to have a firm figure for the Congregational Meeting on the 29th of January.

We wish everyone a healthy, happy and safe New Year.

Deacons

Ruth Carney, co-chair
Jon Ellis, co-chair
Glenn Colpitts
Melissa Ellis
Cathy Leone-O'Brien
Brian Winsor

We are grateful . . .

We have a lot of people to thank for doing many, many things around the church. And we are grateful to each of you. The holiday season is always a busy time for everyone, for our church and this team.

We want to thank all who have been greeters, ushers and coffee hosts & hostesses in 2005.

We want to thank the dedicated members of the Chancel Choir for providing music throughout the year. Thank you to the Wee Choir, Junior Choir and Praise Choir for providing music at special times this year.

We want to thank the Parish Visitors for being a presence to the ill, hospitalized, homebound, etc. You do such a vital ministry at Grace and we appreciate your dedication. We extend an extra thank you to Janet

Cadillac and Gloria Sadler for delivering 23 poinsettias over a two week period. Talk about marathon visiting!

Thank you to the staff of Grace Church: the Reverend Gretchen Jones Switzer, the Reverend Donna Tetreault, Susan Minor and Kab Rabinowitz for all you do. We may not realize or remember to thank you, but we do know your worth to us.

And thank you to all the many, many volunteers, whether on a ministry team, task team, committee, or lending a hand when needed. You are what makes being part of the Grace Church community a family. And an extra special thank you to Linda Hilliard, who does so much for Grace – not to mention putting together *Grace Notes!*

We hope that while you were hectically running around during the holidays, that you found the time to feel the presence of the Christ Child in your hearts. We hope you have had a blessed Christmas and we wish you a joyous and healthy New Year!

Congregational conversation

Continued from page one

Grace (including its members and its future pastor) to stay together faithfully. If you need transportation or have any other obstacle to getting to this meeting, please let us know. We will make every effort to assure that all who wish to be can be present.

It has become abundantly clear that this conversation needs to take place before we move forward in our plans for our new building, and the Deacon's Ministry Team especially needs the support of congregational clarity as it prepares to interview Redevelopment Minister candidates.

Please make this meeting a priority. To stand at the edge of so much unknown is a frightening thing. It is far less so when we stand together.

Special note: There will be no Sunday School on January 15; however, child care will be provided. Parents may want to bring a snack/bag lunch for their children.

Prayer concerns

- Prayers of healing for **Ruth Jones** and **Charlie Philips** who have both been hospitalized.
- **Melissa Ellis** is recovering from a nasty fall. Get well soon!
- Prayers for **Maxine** and **John McBride**, long time Grace members. John has just moved from their home to Oak Knoll for longterm care. This will be a difficult adjustment for both of them.
- Prayers of thanks for the hospitality of the First Church of Christ Scientist and Plymouth Church on Christmas Eve

Ministry Teams

Missions Ministry Team:

Mirlande Butler
Christine Collins
Eleanor Crawford,
Chair
Victoria Ellis
Mary Memmott

Mission

Calling all Cooks!

We are still looking for cooks to provide dinner for the Turning Point Shelter on the third Friday of any month, February – August. The Missions Ministry team will be providing the January dinner. This is a great opportunity to work together in groups or teams (like Ministry Teams, perhaps) to spend a night cooking, socializing and maybe even have a meeting while you do it! If you are interested in signing up, please see Mary Memmott or any member of the Missions team for details.

A Big Thank You!

Thank you to everyone who provided holiday gifts for the children at the Pathways Shelter. Another big thank you to all of you who provided food and supermarket gift cards to help stock the SMOC Food Pantry. We are hoping to continue these food drives

in the future as an ongoing outreach to our community. Stay tuned for more details.

Stearns Farm Share

We are currently investigating a very exciting opportunity for the spring/summer of 2006. The Stearns Farm CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) in Framingham is a non-profit corporation funded primarily by the sale of shares in the harvest. One share feeds two adults and one or two children. The Missions Ministry team is looking into purchasing what is called an Alternate Week Share. The one-time cost is \$300 and would provide a share of food every other week from June – October. We would also have a group from Grace help to fulfill a 6-hour work commitment. This is a great hands-on task - helping in the farm (planting, weeding, harvesting, etc). Our hope is to donate the food share to a family or families in need from our church. We will have more information to follow as we hope to raise the money to secure our share. We are excited about this possibility and will keep you posted.



Financial Update

STEWARDSHIP SECOND 1/2 YEAR 2005

Total Pledged	\$43,534
Pledged for 25 weeks	\$41,860
Received for 25 weeks	\$34,714

STEWARDSHIP 2006 (as of 12/24)

46 pledging units = \$53,716
Estimated 20 more pledges to come in

Financial Secretary, Nancy H. Brown

Note: The after-church mini Holiday Fair brought in about \$350.

Youth

A Twisted Epiphany, January 8!

This second tri-church youth event will be held at Plymouth Church from 6:30 - 8:00. Dinner will be included. Bring a gift you wish you hadn't gotten or a gag gift (max \$10) to share in a new twist on the traditional Yankee swap.

Ministry Teams

Music Ministry
Terri Taylor
Robbie Lovewell
Karolyne White
George Tynes

Music

Caroling a great success.

With our merry band of carolers, we visited and sang with 14 of our shut-in members. There is nothing like hearing voices, often long silent, join in the songs celebrating our savior's birth to remind us of the promise fulfilled at Christmas. Thanks to our carolers: Cathy, Jacob and Dylan Leone-O'Brien; Laura, Andrea and Nolan Buck, Mary Memmott and Ellen and Amelia Burton, Ronda and Eleanor Yeomans, Richard Whitmore, Susan Spaulding, George Tynes, Robbie Lovewell, Karolyne White, Terri, Conor and Meghan Taylor and special guest Eleanor Wells. Thanks also to everyone who added a note to the cards that went out to all 26 of our shut-ins.

Women's Lectio to meet on January 5

All women of Grace are welcome to attend the Women's Lectio Group, which will be held on January 5th at 7:30 at the Christian Science Reading room. You do NOT need to sign up. It is drop in. If you have questions, please contact Laura Buck at 508-875-4781 or falbuck@rcn.com for more information.

The Christian Science Reading Room is located in the Old Path Village Shopping Center at 969 Concord St. (next to Merle Norman).

Upcoming dates for Lectio are as follows: Feb. 6 @ 7:30 pm, March 2 @ 7:30 pm, April 3 @ 7:30 pm, May 4 @ 7:30 pm, June 5 @ 7:00 pm (potluck). Retreat date will be June 9-10, 2006.

Poinsettia Memorial List



Blessings to all who provided generous donations to our Poinsettia Fund. Your gifts allowed us to provide our homebound members with a poinsettia plant as a reminder that they are cherished members of our Grace Church family.

GWU/Circle 13 will meet Wed, January 11, at Linda Hilliard's home, 15 Westgate Road, Framingham, at noon. Please plan to bring a bag lunch. Coffee and dessert will be provided. Program TBA. If you need directions, please call Linda at 508-879-5943. All women of Grace are invited.

- Beverly Ablondi
In Loving Memory of Paul, Husband, Parents & Grandparents
- Paul & Mary Bonfiglio
In Loving Memory of James & Irene Powers
- Walter & Nancy Brown
In Loving Memory of Dave & Daisy Hilton
- Bob & Betty DeCenzo
In Loving Memory of Ward Robert, Son
- Jon & Melissa Ellis, Stephanie, Victoria, & Brett
In Loving Memory Of Pop, G. Grandfather Maimie, G. Grandmother Nana, Grandmother
- Jack & Joyce Fisher
In Loving Memory of George & Rose Hoey, Parents

- Ed & Sharon Kenrick
In Loving Memory of Eddie Kenrick
- Al & Evelyn McGuirk
In Honor of Jessica & Andrew Williams, Grandchildren
- Mary Memmott
In Loving Memory of Faye Clark
- Helen Stetson
In Loving Memory of Her parents, Robert & Yolanda Trueman

Book Club

The Book Club will meet Monday, January 23rd, (snow date Monday January 30th) at Helen Stetson's home, 159 Edgewater Drive, Framingham, at 10:30 AM. We will discuss the book "Pigs in Heaven" by Barbara Kingsolver. If you need directions please call Helen at 508-872-6959. Any other questions about the book club please contact Lynn Burdett at 508-872-7863.



Ending Hunger is within our reach

Submitted by
Ronda Yoemans

... ending hunger is no longer only a problem to be solved - it is a profound opportunity to unleash the human spirit.

“ . . . with the power and the love nurtured by the gift of God’s spirit- we can Make Hunger History” -Bread for the World

(From www.thp.org The Hunger Project) . More than 800 million people live in a state of chronic, persistent hunger. It kills 20,000 people every day. Ending hunger is central to resolving several entangled issues, including population growth, civil unrest, war and environmental destruction, that increasingly threaten the quality of life for everyone. Hunger persists when people are denied the opportunity to: earn enough money or produce enough food, to be educated and learn skills to meet their basic needs, and to have a voice in the decisions that affect their lives. Only by mobilizing the energy, responsibility, creativity and resources of the poor themselves can a society be created that is truly free from hunger. When recognized in this light, ending hunger is no longer only a problem to be solved - it is a profound opportunity to unleash the human spirit. Great progress has been made in the last 20 years. Ending hunger is not an impossible dream. It is a goal within our reach.

How to help:

- Helping can be as easy as going to a hunger website and clicking on a link which brings you to a page of advertisers. Whether you look at the products or not, the advertisers donate to the organization each day you click on the link. (www.thehungersite.org “Give free food”) Tell friends about these websites, and tell them to spread the news to others. Put The Hunger Site URL in the signature block of outgoing emails.
- Send letters and emails urging local,

state and national elected officials to make real changes in laws, policies and budget allocations and achieve progress toward stated goals of ending hunger by 2015.

- Get others involved in projects to assist these organizations. Community, church and school groups can all raise awareness through events, letter writing campaigns, etc.. Funds, however small, all add to the effort. Shop from websites who donate a portion of proceeds to this cause.
- Volunteer to assist organizations dedicated to ending hunger. Such groups can change public attitudes by mobilizing the media and by building alliances among institutions which share their commitment to a future free from hunger. Stay informed by signing up for free newsletters or emails via hunger websites.

Other organizations include:

NetAid
PovertyNet
Save the Children Federation
Share Our Strength
TechnoServe
UNICEF
UN World Food Program
World Emergency Relief
World Vision

Websites of organizations dedicated to ending hunger include:

www.bread.org
www.heifer.org
www.thp.org, www.thehungerproject.org
www.seconddharvest.org
www.results.org
www.one.org
www.endhunger.org
www.worldmanna.org
www.thehungersite.org
www.oxfam.org
www.redcross.org
www.davidsdinner.org

Mark Your Calendar

- Dec. 25 - Jan. 1 - Reverend Gretchen on vacation
- January 3 - Central Council meeting at 7:30 pm
- January 8 - Epiphany Service at Edwards Church in Saxonville, beginning at 10:00 am
- January 15 - Congregational Conversation at Union Avenue beginning at 10 am. Child care provided.
- January 18 - Ministry Team Night. Bag supper at 6:30 pm, Team meetings begins at 7:30 pm
- January 22 - Sunday School begins - 10 am start
- January 22 - Book Study of "The Present Future" beginning a 9 am. You do not need to have read the book to participate in this fascinating conversation.
- January 29 - All Church Congregational meeting beginning at 11:30 am (light lunch and child care provided.)

Fireside Chat: Watch for the date in February.

Happy New Year!

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