

The TCC CONNECTION

Volume 1, Issue 4

December/January
2011/2012



HOLY NIGHT SERVICES

Friday, Dec. 23 7:00 pm
Saturday, Dec 24
7:00 pm & 10:30 pm

CHRISTMAS DAY

SUNDAY, DEC 25
10:30 AM

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Dear friends at TCC,

Faith always asks us to experience something unplanned for and thoroughly free. We are challenged to stop and make room for Someone, who was not originally part of our plan. I suspect that for many of you, as for me, this openness to God is challenging...and yet it is deeply satisfying too.

The story of the birth of Jesus keeps giving us new ways to think about this risk. The impulse that launched three dignitaries toward Jerusalem, the faith that caused Joseph to keep his promises to Mary, the openness that created space in an elderly couple, Zechariah and Elizabeth, for a new born baby... these examples of faith are all about stepping out into the unknown. And there is Mary's faith... a teen mother with so many uncertainties on her hands, so much happiness at risk!

At the heart of it all is our willingness to give up our known "happiness" for the unknown invitation ... with its challenges and joys. This is why faith always asks for courage. And with the courage of faith comes a new measure of life itself.

So I hope that in this season of Advent, Christmas and new beginnings will come something that surprises, challenges and opens up life itself to you. Be ready to let go and to walk freely into the unknown with our God...

*Warmly in faith,
Your Pastor, Jonathan*



LEADERSHIP UPDATE: Board of Ministries

By Bruce Panilaitis, Chair
Board of Ministries

A Time for Change...

"When you're finished changing, you're finished." ...Benjamin Franklin



Amazingly December is upon us! As we gear up for the Christmas Fair, the Advent Season, and the celebration of our Savior's birth, we do so in the midst of continued growth at Tewksbury Congregational Church. As a faith community we have witnessed tremendous growth over the past few years in all aspects of our church life. We have a rejuvenated choir, an active program for youth of all ages, and new families almost every week. We are truly blessed! One additional area of growth has been in the involvement and engagement of our membership in our governance and how we conduct our business as a church. This has happened as a consequence of our decision in April 2010 to suspend large parts of our bylaws and enter into a faithful journey of questioning what we are about, how we conduct our work, and how we can make that process more efficient, effective, and maintain true to our core ideals. This statement is not to be considered an endorsement of the Board of Ministries, but instead recognition that anytime we reconsider the inner workings of any organization, we learn about what makes us who we are. So those of us who have served on the Board have labored with the congregation as a whole to better understand the future direction of our church. This has been a process of experimentation, trial, and even some error (just a few!).

So we come to a point in our church's life to make a decision on our future direction. The Board has accompanied the congregation through nearly two years of exploration and discernment. During the spring and summer of 2010, the Board spent a great deal of time looking inward, to determine its

place in our church governance. From there, a change of focus on our budgeting process was implemented, involving more voices in the decisions around the way we distribute our abundant gifts. In a hope to discern greater wisdom from the congregation as a whole, more than one hundred surveys were collected asking questions, and looking for input on all aspects of our ministry. That input provided the foundation for the TCC Synod that called our leadership to a day of dreaming big, questioning our core values, and laying out practical goals for us to tackle together. Our membership has answered that call with great effect. Our church is alive with energy that can be felt in every aspect of our work both within our walls and in our outreach to our community.

The growth and excitement felt in our church is at least in part a result of our faithful experimentation in our governance. Members have felt empowered to explore new ideas, new initiatives, and to take ownership of their ministries. This has been carried by each committee member, officer, staff member, volunteer, and worshipper in our midst. This has come not through the work of the Board of Ministries, but instead by the journey we have all shared over the past two years. The members of the Board have worked hard, and have had the pleasure of serving the congregation through this period of transition. The culmination of that work can be found in a redesigned Constitution and Bylaws that was built on the foundation of the surveys, the Synod, eighteen months of work within our governance, and the faithful work of the

entire Board of Ministries through many hours of discernment. Regardless of how the document was generated, in the end we are a congregational church and the authority has, does now, and will always reside with our membership. The Constitution and Bylaws are a means for the congregation to grant authority to various members to act on their behalf. After nearly two years it is time for our membership to determine how that authority will be granted and how it will be managed. To that end we will hold an open church meeting on the evening of December 13th at

7 pm to review the document and take questions and suggestions. Further changes to the document will be incorporated by the Board, and then brought before the congregation again in early January. Finally, we will all come to a decision at our annual meeting near the end of January.

So in this season of Advent, in the spirit of anticipation and expectation of His coming, we approach our own re-examination. Just as we lit the Advent candle of "Hope" this past Sunday, let us all live in that spirit of hope that we will discern the right path forward for our faith community.

As we approach this moment as a church I want us all to recognize our fellow servants that have served on the Board of Ministries over the past 18 months:

**Pat Baldwin
Pastor Jonathan Goodell
Ed Henderson**

**Laura Holmes
Christopher Jenkins
Jim Kenney**

**Beth McFadyen
Ken Ramsdell
Sarah San Clemente**

In Faith, Bruce Panilaitis, Chair Board of Ministries



JUNIOR YOUTH GROUP PUMPKIN CARVING

Holy Night services...

This year we are trying something a little new. We are placing one of our candle lit Christmas services on December 23rd. Given the weekend placement of Christmas we wanted to give families more opportunities to worship together. Each Holy Night service will have the essential readings and message, the candle light and traditions of the others. The Friday night service will feature the cherubs, adult singers and a special instrumentalist. Saturday night early will have our youth ensembles and our later service will feature the adult bells and voices. We hope that you will make worship a central activity of this wonderful weekend!

Christmas morning worship!

Every five or six years we experience the very different traditions and special joys of Christmas morning worship! We will begin our time together at 10:30, gathering in the vestry first for coffee and refreshments. We encourage children (and the young at heart) to come 'as they are'. When we have gathered we will process upstairs to a familiar carol, with the youngest one among us carrying the Christ child and others carrying parts of the nativity set. We ask every family to bring a special candle from home to place on the altar. Our service is informal, joyful and a time to enjoy some of the very best Christmas morning carols. We hope that you will plan to join us for a unique worship experience together.

Board of Deacons

By LINDA WILLETTE (Chair of Deacons)



Each year, during Deacon's Retreat, we decide on Scripture that seems to fit our church, reflecting its growth and continued need to grow. Last year one scripture chosen was from Ephesians.

This year we again chose this scripture from Ephesians 4:15

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

Speaking the truth in love. What does that mean? Whose truth are we speaking? Our truth or God's truth? And when and how should we speak it?

Jesus spoke the truth in love, didn't he? Why are we so afraid to speak the truth? Some of us are people pleasers, others conflict avoiders (aren't we all to some extent?). Some may hold up that mirror of truth only to have another turn away. Sometimes, in Speaking the truth, **we** find we are identified as the problem.

As a seekers of the truth, we must decide we will begin to question our answers. In avoiding the truth, we enable others to behave in ways that may not be healthy for them and/or others.

Needing to speak and identify the truth can be difficult. For me the hardest part is discerning if I am feeling God's truth OR my own. On more than 1 occasion I have discussed my concerns with Jonathan. Whose truth was this that I was struggling with? Mine or His? And if it is His, how can I address this speaking the truth in love.

So, if you find yourself in this dilemma, come and talk to Pastor Jonathan and/or a Deacon. Don't ignore it or gossip about it. Let us all become the "mature body of Him who is the head, that is, God.

As you have seen in recent editions of the Flash, the Board of Ministries has prepared a new Constitution and set of Bylaws for the church. Hopefully you have all had a chance to read the documents and watch the PowerPoint presentation that were attached to that article. Now that you have had a chance to digest these proposals, the Board of Ministries would like to invite all interested persons to an informational session which will be held at 7PM on Tuesday, December 13, 2011. This is the night of the meetings of All Boards & Committees and the plan is to wrap up by 7:45 so that the committees can begin their meetings. This will be an opportunity for both questions and input from the congregation. The Board of Ministries will use the feedback to make any appropriate revisions to the draft and recirculate the final proposal prior to a vote to approve the documents at our 278th Annual Meeting in January. We look forward to engaging in this dialogue with you.

Christopher Jenkins

Moderator

ANNUAL REPORT APPEAL

"The bylaws require me to issue the first official request for annual reports one month prior to the end of the fiscal year, pursuant to the following provision. Please email your report to me in MSWord format (either .doc or .docx is fine) by February 14th. Thank you.

Reports – The officers and the boards and committees of the Church and all organizations taking the name and working under the auspices of the Church shall present a written report of the year's activities to the Clerk of the Church, unless otherwise noted, no later than forty-five (45) days after the close of the fiscal year. In addition, said organizations shall present proper statements of their finances for the preceding fiscal year.

Christopher Jenkins, Acting Clerk



MYSTERY MEMBER

1. I live north of here
2. I have lots of pets
3. I love children
4. I need to go on a diet
5. My favorite color is red
6. I have an alternative mode of transportation

Toy Drive a Huge Success!



20K Raised!

Thank you for "Making a Difference!" Many have asked about the success of the Community Giving Tree Toy Drive which our TCC Family supported with gusto. Thanks to the many, many hands that made this possible the following article published by Community Giving Tree should answer the question and also what happens to the left over toys after the sale.

We had so many people at work to make this appreciated support happen including--a money donation for the truck rental, U-Haul's support for discount, money for supplies needed, loan of a large trailer & driver, other drivers & vehicles, publicity including Girl Scout poster makers, and TCC adults & youth workers (greeting, cleaning, sorting, organizing, packaging, loading, & cleaning up). What a day!

Words from Community Giving Tree director --"**Please extend our sincere gratitude to the members of the Tewksbury Church, and God Bless all of you for helping us with our mission.**"

Five truckloads of donated books, bikes and toys were added to the constant flow of toys brought directly to Coolidge Hall on October 22 & 23 for the 21st Annual Used Toy Fair. Two of those truck loads came all the way from the Tewksbury Congregational Church!

Friday night sneak peek participants brought in packages of diapers in exchange for a head start on bargains...\$7,000 was raised during the 2 hour pre-sale. Saturday was as busy as ever, with the overwhelming sentiment that the toys were better organized and priced than in years past.

The new check out system proved to eliminate lots of frustration and long lines. The day ended up yielding another \$13,000 to help us continue our programs.

All left over toys, books, bikes and games were given to deserving charities. About 20 charities came right before the October storm to fill their trucks, vans and cars full of toys for families they help. One last truck load of unsold toys was filled and will be going to the Dominican Republic in November.





RELIGIOUS EDUCATION NEWS

Sue Panilaitis, DRE

The Reason for the Season

As preparations for the holidays begin and the excitement begins to mount, let us not forget the reason for the season. During the winter months, in addition to stories of Jesus' birth, we will get a glimpse of how Jesus grew up and how his ministry began. Learning about Jesus and his ministry is the key learning experience for a Christian. The winter quarter can be broken down into three parts:

Hope is Born: Lessons will focus on the birth of Jesus. As children hear the stories of the angel's visits to Mary and Joseph, the trip to Bethlehem, and the visit of the shepherds, children will learn that Jesus is the baby that God promised.

Jesus, Son of God: What were the first indications that this child of Mary and Joseph was more than just an ordinary child? During this unit, youth will learn the Bible stories of the wise men, Jesus at the Temple, Jesus' baptism, and Jesus calling the fisherman and Matthew. Youth will learn that Jesus is the Son of God.

Jesus and his Ministry: During the month of February, youth will meet some of the people Jesus knew and hear some of his teachings. What was this man like? Youth will hear stories of Mary and Martha, Jesus and the children, the disciples traveling two by two, and Zacchaeus. They will learn that Jesus teaches us how to live and that we can be followers of Jesus.

Celebrate the season with your children

- ★ Take a moment to visit Tewksbury Public Library's Festival of Trees to view a tree put together by our youth at TCC. While there, participate in the Festival of Trees Scavenger Hunt for Children or take a moment to view the many trees before voting for your favorite tree (best themed, Children's choice, People's choice). New this year is "Facebook Tree of the Day". During the month of December, a different tree each day will be posted on the library's Facebook page (with a link to the organization's own website). Be on the lookout for our own TCC tree.
- ★ All are welcome at the Advent Workshop on Sunday December 11th. Beginning directly after adult worship, families are invited to enjoy a lunch of hot dogs, chicken nuggets and chips before enjoying some time creating crafts. Projects this year include decorating a stocking, making a jingle bell ornament/necklace, creating various pieces of jewelry using beads and much more. Crafts are offered at various levels of difficulty to accommodate the diverse ages. As always, there is no cost to participate though we encourage families to contribute a side dishes or dessert to share.

Ladies Aid, Friendship Circle and Holiday Friends News

Submitted By Sue Trepaney

The Blessings of our Women's Groups and Our Church

I feel very fortunate, as I am able to attend three creative and wonderful women's groups at TCC—**Ladies Aid, Friendship Circle and Holliday Friends**. At this time of year, you won't believe the amount of work the members of **Holiday Friends** accomplish within a short period of time to get ready for the annual church fair. They create holiday arrangements, gather items for gift baskets take and fill orders for kissing balls, and orders for indoor or outdoor baskets filled with fresh greens. After the fair, we take a 'breather' and on Thursday, December 8th at 9:00am members of both **Friendship Circle and Holiday Friends** will gather at the Holiday Inn to enjoy a holiday brunch and Yankee Swap.

Members of **Ladies Aid** will enjoy a Christmas luncheon on Wednesday, December 14th at the 99 Restaurant, Tewksbury. We will meet in the church parking lot at 11:30am to carpool to our destination. The ladies at our November meeting voted to give a donation to either the Transitional Living Center or the Salvation Army instead of swapping gifts. Alice Golen will collect our donations and provide a check to one or both of the organizations depending on the designation by each member.

The wisdom of Fred Rogers, remember him? He hosted a television program for many years geared for young children, but with remarkable wisdom we all came to love Mr. Rogers. He said in his book, ¹ *Human relationships are primary in all of living. When the gusty winds blow and shake our lives, if we know that people care about us, we may bend with the wind...but we won't break.*

I think about this when I attend a **Ladies Aid, Friendship Circle** or **Holiday Friends** meeting; I am in awe of some of the ladies and what they do. For example, Irene Sclafani (and I don't think she will mind my mentioning this) is 93 years young and she is at every **Ladies Aid** meeting and attends weekly Sunday worship. When she was in her 90's she walked to TCC because she didn't have a ride to church one morning! Jean Metcalf works tirelessly coordinating baskets, working on arrangements, digging out supplies in our messy (!) but organized closets while going through radiation treatments. Dottie Belida, a wonderful friend of Ladies Aid and member, is constantly in our thoughts as she temporarily resides with her daughter, Dawn, in Raleigh, NC while recovering from health issues.

In this article, I am just highlighting a few of my TCC friends, but there are others who face the gusty winds and will not break. What a wonderful gift these women provide—the gifts of strength, carrying on in spite of adversity and a willingness to work in spite of limitations. This year as I look back over 12 months, not only have the members of **Ladies Aid, Friendship Circle** and **Holiday Friends** been a large part of my life, but the church too, as I see many new families and children attending worship along with an enthusiastic staff, Pastor Jonathan, Donna Spencer Collins, our new Director of Music, Horacio Castro, and church office staff, JoJo and Jill, where there is always a friendly voice at the end of the telephone. Truly, I can share with you...what a blessing!

¹ *The World According to Mister Rogers: Important Things to Remember*, Fred Rogers,



Coming in January....

You may be curious about some of the traditions and experiences that make our church what it is. Membership and Enlistment is hosting three 'after church sessions' in the new year on getting to know our church (and each other) a little better. Called 'Ports of Call' we will be sailing toward the harbors of deeper understanding and greater joy in our life together. These will be fun and informative, a chance to understand our life and worship better. The classes can also be a great first step toward becoming more active in our congregation... for newcomer and old timer alike! Come to one, two or all three.



This issue's
Mystery Member!
Did you guess it?

Our December Round Table!

We continue our new 'round table' tradition of a special program for the church as a whole on the second Sunday of the month... in December. On that day the RE committee will be hosting our traditional Advent workshop for parents and children. At the same time Pastor Jonathan will be leading a 'water colors for Christmas' session... a chance to meditate and reflect on the encounter of Mary with Gabriel in the easy medium of water color painting. We will focus on playing with color and no special expertise is needed. Come and 'mess around' a little with water, paints and brushes!

Stewardship Supper and Pie Social



IF I COULD ASK GOD ANYTHING

Submitted by JoJo Scharmer
From *If I could ask God anything...* (Kathryn Slattery)

What's the Difference Between a Disciple and an Apostle?

The word *disciple* means "pupil" or "student". Everyone who is a student or follower of Jesus is a disciple. Because you are a follower of Jesus, you are a disciple!

The word *apostle* means "one who is sent out".

When Jesus selected His twelve apostles, it was for a special purpose. It was to send them to spread the good news of God's love all over the world. (Matthew 28:16-20).

The fact that today, more than two thousand years later, the story of Jesus is still being told, shows that the apostles did a very good job!

JUNIOR YOUTH GROUP NEWS

The JYG wants to help the poverty stricken people of Haiti. As the country still has not recovered from a massive earthquake last year, Haitians are lacking simple essentials such as spoons.

New Missions provides a hearty cooked meal at school. But, there are rules—good ones to protect health and life. Each student must wash their hands before eating. Eating without a spoon is not the best option for a child. Hungry, without a spoon, their eyes search for a friend who will let them borrow his or her spoon.

This is an opportunity not only to give those children something that they do not have, but it is also an opportunity to help our youth to connect with those who aren't as fortunate as they are, and to help them to do the work of Jesus here on earth.

A spoon... what a blessing we can be with something so small. Go buy spoons... buy hundreds of spoons! Buy them for the child, for their family, and buy them for the village. You can find them at yard sales or thrift shops. And then, beginning January 15th, please place them in the bowls found around church!

An exasperated mother, whose son was always getting into mischief, finally asked him, "How do you expect to get into Heaven?"

The boy thought it over and said, "Well, I'll just run in and out and in and out and keep slamming the door until St. Peter says, 'For Heaven's sake, Jimmy, come in or stay out!'" From Butlerwebs (Children in Church)



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PERMIT No. 1
TEWKSBURY,
MA 01876

Tewksbury Congregational Church
10 East Street
Tewksbury, MA 01876

phone: 978-851-9411
fax: 978-851-9413
e-mail: tewksburycc@verizon.net
website: www.tewksburycc.org

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A Thrill of Hope

The Christmas Story in Word and Art

Come join us at Open Door as we watch a presentation of the familiar story of Christmas as told in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Scripture passages are illustrated and interpreted in the stunning artwork of John August Swanson, along with commentary by some of America's premier biblical scholars.

Sunday December 4th
11:00 a.m. in the Parlor.



