

# The First Congregational Church of Reading

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST • AN OPEN AND AFFIRMING CONGREGATION

Produced by our Church Family

June 2009

Volume 2009, Issue 1



## First ChurchNEWS

### Statement of Purpose

We gather as a faith community to love and magnify God. Guided by the Holy Spirit, we will love our neighbors as ourselves, advocating for peace and justice. We will go out and share our faith in Christ, inviting others to join us. We will be nurturers of the spirit and teachers of the Word. We will welcome and provide sanctuary to all.

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Upcoming Events	1
In-Between Time	2
Search Committee, Sermon Schedule	3
FCCR Flower Structure	4-5
Opportunities to Participate in the Life of the Church	6
Become an ACE at Prayer	7
Christian Formation	8
Reading Cares	9
Thank you Notes	10
Prayers	11
Calendar	12

### All-Church Picnic – June 14th

Who says you have to be a kid to have fun? Join us at the annual FCCR picnic on **June 14<sup>th</sup>** at Ipswich River Park in North Reading for some fun for all ages. We have reserved the Gazebo from noon to 3:00pm, so there will be shade and tables and space for games as well. CE will provide grills, burgers (meat and veggie), hot dogs, and buns. Families whose last names begin with A through L are asked to bring desserts. Families whose names begin with M through Z are asked to bring side dishes. Everyone should bring his or her own beverages. If you have ideas or materials for outdoor games or crafts, please contact Linda Jerrett at [ljerrett@bu.edu](mailto:ljerrett@bu.edu) or Betsy Schneider at [betsy.Schneider@comcast.net](mailto:betsy.Schneider@comcast.net).

### Annual Meeting Recap

The FCCR Annual Meeting was held on May 15, 2009 with several important decisions made. An expense budget of \$358,016 was passed for 2009-2010, which includes a deficit. If you haven't pledged or can increase your pledge, even slightly, please consider doing so. The budget presentation is in the annual report, available in the office.

A presentation of the proposed new church functional structure was made and accepted by the congregation for a one-year trial. This structure has been revised since the May newsletter with input from the congregation. It includes a Visioning Team and five Ministries - Mission, Congregational Care, Worship, Christian Formation and Resources. Deacons remain as a standing committee under the Worship Ministry. (See description on pages 4 and 5.) There will be a January congregational meeting to assess the new structure and further discussion at

next year's Annual Meeting to either continue the trial or amend the By-laws to reflect the new structure.

Elections were held with the following results: Moderator - David Sanford, Assist. Treasurer - Ralph Blunt, Collector - Christine Georgilas, Assist. Collector - Shirley Holden. There were no nominations for Treasurer or Clerk. The first Visioning Team consists of Linda Ananian, Bev Cook, Gary Hylan, Deidre Ryan, Betsy Schneider, Kathleen Taylor, Brian Tucker and Gay Williams. Deacons are Judy Austin, Lorna Knapp, John Lape, Jane McCord, Linda Pedersen, Deidre Ryan, Laurie Tucker. The Visioning Team was tasked with filling the Treasurer and Clerk positions.

Special thanks were given to Gary Hylan for his work on Property. Thanks and best wishes were given to Bob Svensson for all his contributions to the church, particularly as Treasurer. And thanks to all who participated!

Church Contact Information:

[www.churchofreading.org](http://www.churchofreading.org)

This Sunday, 15 of our young adults will be confirming their faith. Most of them are ninth graders and a few are sophomores and a few eighth-graders. When I think back to what I believed at that age, it was pretty thin. And, moreover, now as an adult, I wonder why anyone would be particularly interested in what a 15-year-old had to say about eternal verities. Most adults are still grappling with what they believe about the Triune God and the Christian faith.

That is one reason why I didn't ask the confirmands to write a Statement of Faith this year. As a young teenager, one has not yet lived enough life to know what they think, feel or believe about a lot of different matters. At that age they are just coming into their own and questioning everything. What's more, a lot of the time I find myself asking these 'tween and teenagers for answers to questions they have not yet asked. At age 14, 15 or 16 are you wondering why good people in the world suffer? What does it mean to say, "I believe in the resurrection of the body?" Is love a verb or a noun? What does it mean to say, "Jesus died for the sins of the world?" What does it mean to serve selflessly? No wonder there is push back. Is there anything more annoying to a teenager than an adult asking them to scratch where there is no itch?

On the other hand, Confirmation is the time for a young person to explore not what they believe, but what the historic Christian Church affirms. Ours is an historic, inherited faith. It is a collection of beliefs, practices, rituals, and ways of looking at and being in the world that is not of our own doing or choosing. It is less that "we get it" and more of "it gets us." As we immerse ourselves in this world we become shaped and formed by it.

Historically, converts to the Christian faith went through a three-year catechesis (teaching program) and were baptized on Easter morning. The bishop would then lay his hands upon them and "confirm" that they were baptized. As the church grew and bishops had oversight over numerous parishes, the local priest would baptize the new convert and later the bishop would come by and "confirm" the baptized person's authentic profession of faith with the laying on of hands.

Over the centuries confirmation in mainline Protestant circles has "devolved" into joining the church. It was not so much an initiation into the full life of the congregation as a young adult, but graduation from going to Sunday school and church all the time. Sociological studies have confirmed that many mainliner baby boomers that went through confirmation in their youth are no longer active in a local church. Ideally, it should be a time when a young person claims for themselves what their parents claimed for them at their baptism. Second-hand faith becomes first-hand faith.

I personally think a year is way too short for confirmation. In my last church, we had a four-year program called "Preparation for Life," which included a meal and instruction/sharing on everything from Jesus, prayer, mission, self-esteem, consumerism, sexuality, commercial media, you name it. The program lasted for four years, and high school seniors were sent off better equipped to brave the world. Another option might be one year of instruction and one year with a mentor.

So, in the end, here's what I propose. Instead of writing a Statement of Faith, share with us a "God Glimpse." Tell us where you've seen God in your life—through nature, through a poem or music, in a caring friend, perhaps on a mission trip or at a summer camp. We know you don't have it all figured out, so tell about a story or experience that shows you God is real.

Next, we won't ask you what you believe (not to say that it's not important, but to say instead that it's a life long journey), but we will ask you, "Do you want to be a follower of Jesus Christ?" As best as you are able and according to your best wits, do you want to follow the teachings and practices of this man who continues to challenge and astound two centuries later?

Last, while we hope you can confirm the vows your parents made at baptism for you—to accept Christ as Savior and Lord, to renounce evil, to follow in the steps of Jesus, to be part of a community of faith—what we will do for you is confirm the vows we made to you and your parents when you were baptized. There this church promised to love and support you along life's way and we will continue to do so, no matter what you believe at this moment. Think of it as a candle left burning in the window, so you can find your way back home when you're ready.

Here's wishing God's grace, mercy and peace to our current class of Confirmands. I hope to see you Sunday to cheer them on!

Blessings, Rev. Norm

## Update from the Search Committee

[Adapted and updated from comments read at Annual Meeting on May 15, 2009.]

We thought we would take this opportunity to update you on what the Search Committee has been up to since we were approved at last year's annual meeting.

We started work during the summer of last year, first meeting with Wendy Vanderhart, Acting Area Minister for the Mass. Conference. She gave us the information and materials we needed to begin work. Shortly thereafter we all attended an all-day retreat at Bob Svensson's beautiful cottage in New Hampshire to get to know each other and kick things off in a prayerful way. We spent many months working on the FCCR profile, which is sent out to all candidates who we want to interview.

By the way, thanks again to all of you for participating in the survey we sent out. It helps us give candidates an accurate and up-to-date picture of us as a church. Our area minister said it was the best profile she has ever seen! If you haven't seen it, there is a copy in the church office for you to look at. Please do!

Once all that writing (and revising) was done, we began accepting profiles from candidates. We received about 30 profiles immediately, and they have been coming in at an average of about 5 a week. The Search Committee meets on average about 1.25 times each week to review profiles as a group.

I am not a numbers person, but let me try to give you a picture of our progress:

We have received around 71 profiles all together. As a group we have reviewed 46 profiles, rejecting some and putting some into a "B" pile to be reviewed again later. Those candidates who received extremely high ratings have been sent our profile, a bulletin, a newsletter and other church materials. We have scheduled interviews with 3 of these candidates during the next couple of weeks.

Speaking for myself (Laurie), I have found this to be a rewarding and yes, even an enjoyable experience so far thanks to the dedication, talent, hard work and (thank God) senses of humor of the other committee members. Other than the unforeseen challenge of the profile (which another search committee compared to giving birth without an epidural) there is only one down side to this, and that is that we will soon lose Bob Svensson as a committee member. But we are so much better for all his contributions! Thank so much to all of you in the congregation for the trust you have placed in us and for giving us an opportunity to serve God in this capacity.

The Search Committee: Laurie Tucker, Christine Hylan, Joyce Burnham, Ginny Davenport, Jane McCord, Bob Svensson, Craig Taylor, Steve Viegas

## New Seminarian to Join FCCR in the Fall

The Deacons are pleased to announce that Ruth Richards will be joining us in September as our Field Education student from Andover Newton. She will bring tremendous gifts to our church with her experience in Christian Education and leadership in her home church. She spent last year as a seminarian at First Baptist Church in Worcester and honed her ministry skills even more there. She plans to concentrate on adult education, women's ministry, and working with us on our infrastructure. In addition, she and other members of FCCR are taking the training to teach Our Whole Lives (OWL), a curriculum for teenagers on human relationship and sexuality from a Christian perspective.

## June Sermon Schedule 2009

### June 7, Trinity Sunday

Holy Communion

*Isaiah 6:1-8*

*John 3:1-17*

*Romans 8:12-17*

"So Explain it to Me," Rev. Bendroth preaching

### June 14, 11th Sunday in Ordinary Time

*1 Sam 15:34-16:13*

*Mark 4:26-34*

*2 Cor 5:6-10, 14-17*

"Seed Faith," Rev. Bendroth preaching

### June 21, 12th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dahm Baptism

*Job 38:1-11*

*Mark 4:34-41*

*2 Cor 6:1-13*

"Making Sense of Suffering," Rev. Bendroth preaching

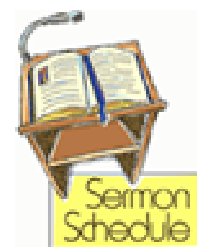
### June 28, 13th Sunday in Ordinary Time

*2 Sam 1:1, 17-27*

*Mark 5:21-43*

*2 Cor 8:7-15*

"Saved by Faith," Rev. Bendroth preaching



## FCCR Blooms into the New “Flower” Structure

Annual Meeting accepted the new functional structure proposed by the NOW group and the transition has begun! The Visioning Team (flower center) is made up of Linda Ananian, Bev Cook, Gary Hylan, Deidre Ryan, Betsy Schneider, Kathleen Taylor, Brian Tucker and Gay Williams along with the Treasurer, Clerk and pastoral staff. Visioning will drive the vision as set out by the congregation (initially the Golden Days vision) and keep the Ministries focused. It will also facilitate communications and conduct the business of the church between congregational meetings.

Five of the “visioners” will coordinate the five Ministries (petals) - Mission, Congregational Care, Worship, Christian Formation and Resources. The two At-large visioners are intended to focus on specific areas such as nominating and mediation. The Deacons retain their responsibilities related to pastoral oversight and pastor/parish relations as a standing committee of the Worship Ministry. Each Ministry will organize to best suit its needs and recruit ‘sprinters’ to make activities happen.

The NOW group has committed to assisting the transition and ensuring nothing falls through the cracks. Visioning met with the NOW group on May 18<sup>th</sup> to discuss upcoming events and begin organizing Visioning. Brian Tucker volunteered as Facilitator of Visioning and was accepted by consensus. The first Visioning meeting is Monday, June 8<sup>th</sup> – all are invited to participate.

**What’s next - YOU** have a spot in the new organizational structure. Everyone is invited and expected to pick a Ministry to support – no meetings required, just lend an open mind and prayerful input. Sign-up sheets are on the bulletin board by the Dining Hall ramp along with more information. The five Ministry visioners need everyone’s support to organize the Ministries, decide on the year’s activities and provide a pool of ‘sprinters’. You may sign up for more than one Ministry and you may also participate in any activity, whether it is sponsored by “your” Ministry or another. The outgoing Commissions have been requested to meet with the Ministry visioners in June to ensure a smooth transition.

This is a work in progress – help the flower grow! God’s light is shining down but we need everyone to water it with prayer and participation.

## FCCR Trial Structure

5/14/09

**Unchanged** from current Bylaws: Name, Covenant, Character, Membership, Governing Body (i.e., congregation), Executive and Financial Officers of the church, Pastors

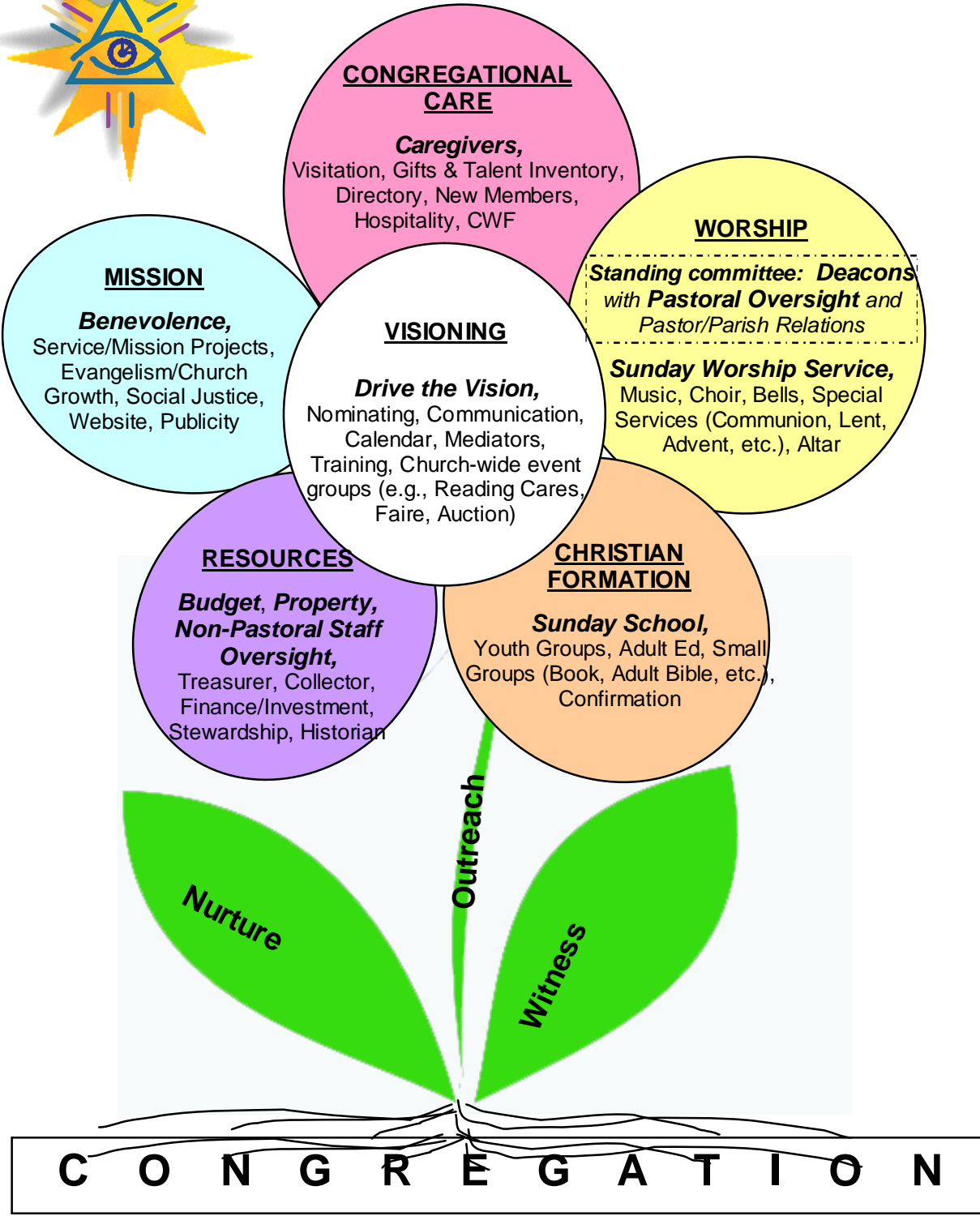
**Proposed changes:** From current four Commissions plus Committees to (see flower graphic on opposite page )

Visioning Team (flower center) – provides the leadership to bring the church’s vision to fruition. Made up of eight active members elected at Annual Meeting plus the Clerk (acts as Recording Secretary of Visioning), Treasurer and Pastor. One of the eight members will act as Facilitator of Visioning, five will represent the five Ministries, two will be At-large members. The five Ministry representatives may or may not be the Facilitators of their Ministries. They will act as the main communication channel between their Ministries and Visioning. The two At-large members may be focals for particular responsibilities such as nominating or mediation.

Visioning’s prime goal is to look to the future of the church as directed by the Governing Body (congregation) and keep the Ministries focused. It has been suggested that a special quarterly visioning meeting be held to ensure the prime focus is kept. Visioning will also serve as the central communication point for all the church’s activities and act on behalf of the Governing Body.

Ministries (flower petals) – have broad areas of responsibility, must carry out function(s) listed first in bold italics. Ministries may form goal-oriented sub-teams as needed (size and duration as needed). Each Ministry is represented on Visioning and that Visioning member would be the main two-way communication vehicle between Visioning and the Ministry and would coordinate the formation of the Ministry. Ministry members are not elected at Annual Meeting, the exception being Deacons (see below).

Deacons will be a standing committee (the only standing committee) under the Worship Ministry. The focus of Deacons will be Pastoral Staff oversight and Pastor/Parish relations. Deacons will be elected at Annual Meeting. There is not a specified number of Deacons.



Vision:

As Gardeners of the spirit, we provide fertile soil to nurture both church and community, harvesting faith, compassion, and understanding of God's love, as taught by Jesus Christ

Essential responsibilities are shown in bold and italics

## Youth Group Leader Opportunity



We are looking for an energetic, creative, part-time Youth Group Leader starting in the fall of 2009. This individual will be responsible for shaping and running youth groups for middle and high school students, in conjunction with the Christian Education Commission and the Pastor. S/he would lead 3-4 monthly meetings that would build community, provide opportunity for Christian formation, recreational activities and service projects. Anticipated requirement of 12-16 hours per month, with possibility of additional hours for OWL and/or mission trip leadership. Applicants should email a resume and cover letter to: Rev. Dr. Norman B. Bendroth at [revnorm.fccr@verizon.net](mailto:revnorm.fccr@verizon.net).

## Book Group Selection for June

### **June 2 – Hot, Flat, and Crowded – Why We Need a Green Revolution – And How It Can Renew America by Thomas L. Friedman**

Friedman proposes what he calls “Geo-Greenism” to save the planet from overheating and to make America healthier and more secure. He suggests clean-technology breakthroughs are needed and declares this an “energy technology revolution” that will be of significant proportions. Tom McCord will lead the discussion.

The June 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting will be at 7:30 at the home of John and Mary Ann Lape (3 Niblick Way, North Reading - 978 664-3583). Everyone is welcome to participate in all or some of the book discussions. The group meets on the first Tuesdays of the month from October to June.

## Please Consider Ushering and Greeting in the Fall

We want to send a BIG THANK YOU to all of the people who have served as ushers these past several months. Again this year, we have had several new folks who have really enjoyed ushering and greeting on Sunday mornings. They have been guided by the more seasoned (experienced) people who have been ushering for months (in some cases years). The deacons will be handling the ushering duties during the summer months, but don't forget you can contact Shirley Holden ([skh13@verizon.net](mailto:skh13@verizon.net) 781 581 7758) if you would like to usher and greet starting in September.



## Christian Education Summer Program

The CE Summer program, full of fun activities and crafts, will start in Room 13 and the Nursery on Sunday, June 21<sup>st</sup>. We will need two volunteers each week to help cover this program. There will be a sign up sheet outside the Nursery or you can see Linda Jerrett at any time or e-mail her at [ljerrett@bu.edu](mailto:ljerrett@bu.edu) with your interest. Please help! If we have no volunteers then parents are welcome to go to these rooms and use our supplies but must remain with their children at all times.



**Calling All Volunteer Musicians** - The time is here to sign up to help with music over our Summer Sundays. This is a great way to offer your talents in worship in a relaxed setting. Come and sing or play an instrument, or gather several folks together to offer something unique. Sign up sheets are posted in the Music Room, or you can email your date request to Chad Kidd at [chad-kidd@churchofreading.org](mailto:chad-kidd@churchofreading.org). Summer volunteer musicians begin Sunday, June 28 and go through Sunday, September 6. Thank you.

**Faire Request** ~ I am looking for glass baby food jars for the sand art craft for the Midway. We made \$110 profit on them in 2007. We could have made more but we only had 110 jars!! If you have any jars, I'll take as many as you have, please bring them to the office whenever it is convenient for you. Thank you Kathy Guyott, (781) 944-7617.

Prayer as a topic of discussion has been around us much lately. A few weeks ago, a Cardinal in Ireland suggested his congregants “tweet” a prayer a day, i.e. send out prayers via Twitter. Then this past week, NPR has been running a series on the science of spirituality, discussing, among other things, how prayer can change your brain...for the better, naturally.

Then we have the Anthem for Sunday, May 24<sup>th</sup>:

“Lord, listen to your children prayin’  
Lord, send your spirit to this place...

Something’s gonna happen  
Like the world has never known  
When the people of the Lord  
Get down to pray  
A door’s gonna swing open  
And the walls come a tumblin’ down  
When the people of the Lord  
Get down to pray....”

It would seem that prayer can be a positive good, both for individuals—their brains get fixed up—and for society as a whole. The latter comes about when “the people of the Lord get down to pray”. That is, praying together provides benefits over and above those from praying alone, benefits which expand beyond the pool of those praying.

Because time is a constant concern these days, we have set up several methods whereby people at FCCR can pray as part of a group, but do so when they have the time. We have an e-mail group (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/FCCR-ACE>) whose members send prayers out each day. To join send an e-mail to [FCCR-ACE-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:FCCR-ACE-subscribe@yahoogroups.com). We have a prayer blog (<http://fccr-ACE.org/>), which was used heavily during Lent, and which still remains active, albeit at a lower intensity. If you wanted to follow Cardinal Brady’s advice and try Twitter, you could follow FCCR\_ACE ([http://twitter.com/fccr\\_ace](http://twitter.com/fccr_ace)). From there you can get hooked up with other FCCR twitters.

The point of all these groups is to make it easier for us to find time to pray *intentionally*. The NPR story alluded to above indicated that virtually everyone prays. Most of the time these are what is called flash prayers, e.g. you’re stuck in a traffic jam and you pray, “Dear God, please help clear things up so I won’t be late”.

Flash praying is good, because it helps keep God in people’s minds through out the day. Intentional praying is better because it stills us enough that we can forge a connection to God. An old adage holds that God wants our *presence* more than our presents. During times of intentional prayer, we do indeed become present with God. Why not try it out? You might like it.



### Examples of Twitter Prayers

1. CreatorGod Another day ends. I pray tonight’s rest will help me find the error in my set up. That I will awake with clarity. Always hope.7:52 PM May 11th from twhirl
2. CreatorGod Overall, it was a good day. Thank you. Played in church; played with grandpuppy; cooked stir fry; wrote Mom. What’s not to like? 9:04 PM May 10th from twhirl
3. CreatorGod While I’m at it, I would like to ask you bless all mothers. My mother and my mother-in-law have blessed me greatly. Thank You.7:05 PM May 9th from twhirl
4. CreatorGod Seemed like an OK day. Thank You. Now, I pray my rest tonight will energize me for tomorrow’s service and the work I have after.7:04 PM May 9th from twhirl
5. MercifulSavior Not optimistic about peace vigil. Cat calls >normal. People don’t believe in peace? That’s what you came to bring, right?7:02 PM May 9th from twhirl
6. CreatorGod I pray that our peace vigil might turn just one heart today. One heart at a time can bring peace, right?7:20 AM May 9th from twhirl

Remember: Even in the summertime, people get hungry. There are fewer food drives in the summer, So, let’s keep the food pantry well stocked!



# On June 14<sup>th</sup> This Is The Place To Be!

## Children's Sunday & Teacher Appreciation Day! (June 14<sup>th</sup>)



Please be sure that your children are at church from now until our last day of Sunday School on June 14<sup>th</sup>, when the kids will be performing and displaying their talents for the congregation. This is always a day full of photo opportunities, ooh's and aah's and loud clapping! Don't miss it.

On this day we will also be celebrating our volunteer teachers. Did you know it takes 10 – 12 adults per Sunday to keep our program running? Many, if not most, of our current volunteer staff has worked for years and years to support our Christian Education program and our children. Please be sure to come to church on June 14<sup>th</sup> to stand and cheer for these teachers who give so much of themselves to lead and care for the spirits of our children.

### Nursery:

Julie O'Loughlin  
Neovi Plankey

### Pre-K:

Amy Imrich  
Melissa McDonald  
Scott McDonald  
Carol O'Loughlin

### 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup>:

Lesley Kerr  
Chris Kerr  
David Rose  
Shirley Slack

### 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup>:

A.J. Jerrett  
Nova Leigh Krupa  
Connie Swaebe  
David Swaebe

### 6<sup>th</sup> & 7<sup>th</sup>:

Len Corey  
Duncan Cruickshanks  
Heather Cruickshanks  
Joann Sanford

### 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup>:

Betsy Schneider

Next year, we hope and pray to see new faces among the veterans – hopefully including some of those recently confirmed! – to help us continue to guide our children to walk towards Christ and to hold him in their hearts every day. Our curriculum is easy to follow and help is always available. If you are interested, I would be happy to bring you on a tour of one of our classes during the first few weeks of June to show you what it's all about! Please help us keep our program going! I welcome questions and would love to talk about becoming a teaching volunteer if you are interested! We split the year into 4 sessions, with each team teaching twice. This allows plenty of family and worship time! You can call me at 781-944-8210 or e-mail me at [ljerrett@bu.edu](mailto:ljerrett@bu.edu). Thank you!

## We have an Ark!



Thanks to everyone from our congregation for their generous spirits and actions, which have allowed us to once again reach the goal of an ark for Heifer International, as we have done each year since 2006!

“The Heifer Gift Ark offers hope worldwide to families who are poor and hungry. You're helping families start on a journey to fulfill a seemingly impossible dream - to secure food and a source of dependable income. Each family who receives livestock will pass on one or more of the animal's offspring to other families who are in need in their community. Every gift will multiply for years to come. Imagine how this gift will change the world. Two cows bring milk and income to a Russian village. Two sheep help families in Arizona produce wool. Two camels help families in Tanzania earn income by transporting agricultural and industrial materials. Two oxen pull plows and carts in Uganda. Two water buffalo help Cambodian families increase rice production through animal draft power. And that's just the first five sets of animals ... the ark provides 15 pairs of animals to change lives. What a wonderful way to bring joy to the world!” –Heifer International

Special thanks to all of our children and teachers for making this work, to our dutiful money counters who kept it all straight and Outreach for getting us over the final hurdle. Your warmth and compassion for families and children in need is both powerful and humbling.

## Reading Cares at Friends and Family Day

For the second year, Reading Cares will have a booth at Reading Friends and Family Day on Saturday, June 20th. This is a wonderful opportunity to connect with the community, and we open our booth to any non-profit agency or organization. Last year, the weather was perfect and we hosted groups as divergent at Habitat for Humanity and the Sawtelle Family Hospice. Kids enjoyed fishing at our "pond" while the adults discussed volunteerism in Reading.

We will need friendly volunteers to help staff the booth from 11-3pm, plus set-up and clean-up. Please let us know when you can help, or if you have any suggestions.

Electronic newsletters are sent out periodically with volunteer opportunities and events in the area to people on our email list. If you would like to receive these or volunteer to help at Friends and Family Day, please contact [info@readingcares.org](mailto:info@readingcares.org) or Betsy Schneider at [betsy.schneider@comcast.net](mailto:betsy.schneider@comcast.net).

## God with Skin On

About a month ago I had an opportunity to go to Andover Newton to hear Rev. Anne Robertson, Executive Director of the Mass. Bible Society, speak about her most recent book, God With Skin On: Finding God's Love in Human Relationships. Relationships are of primary importance for me so I wanted to go, and invited Connie Corey to go with me.

I suspect there are any number of versions of the "God with skin on" story among clergy folks. The one she points to is that of a small boy being left alone in his room, lights out, when it was time for bed. He was afraid of the dark and cried out for his Mom. She reassured him that God would be with him throughout the night. And he replied, "But Mama, I need God with skin on!" What he needed was God in the flesh, present with him. I think we have all had times that we wanted to have God with skin on walk with us. What this little guy probably did not know was that he was talking about incarnation. As mature Christians we recognize that word – Jesus was as the Gospel of John writes, "the Word made flesh."

In her book Anne Robertson writes "There is still a crying need for God to take on human flesh – every day in every place." She goes on to propose that we – yes, ordinary folks like you and like me – are called to be the Body of Christ in the world, we are called to be God with skin on for others.

Coincidentally (read "God blessed me with this find at just the right time!"), I read a blog entry by an acquaintance that spoke to this same idea. The writer of the blog is an ordained UCC pastor, former youth pastor, former English high school

teacher, a writer and a chef. He shared Eugene Peterson's translation of 1 John 3:16-18 from The Message which reads, "This is how we've come to understand and experience love: Christ sacrificed his life for us. This is why we ought to live sacrificially for our fellow believers, and not just be out for ourselves. If you see some brother or sister in need and have the means to do something about it but turn a cold shoulder and do nothing, what happens to God's love? It disappears. And you made it disappear." When we show compassion, when we visit or phone someone who is lonely or ill, when we offer someone a ride to church, we are God with skin on. We are showing others God's love. This fellow quoted another writer who spoke about the need to understand "the healing touch of intentional proximity." Think about those words. As a faith community, as church, we choose intentional proximity. We choose to be responsible by connecting with each other. In that connecting we may enter into another's pain, or another's joy, or their sense of being lost; by being there, by being present; by choosing intentional proximity, we are God with skin on for another.

Anne Robertson begins the first chapter of her book, "You may be the only Jesus some people ever meet." Jesus calls us into relationship – to love God and to love our neighbor as ourselves. As members of this community, you are blessed as you move about in the world, wearing a cloak of care and understanding, not shying away, but rather extending your healing touch, intentionally sitting or standing beside one who might otherwise be alone.

*Gay Williams*

## Thank you notes:

Special thanks to Joann Sanford for her presentation of the new organizational model at our recent Annual Meeting. And thanks too to Joan Kingston, Lesley Kerr and Rev. Norm who helped flesh out the model in its earliest shape. Those of you who attended the forums transformed the beginning form into one that found acceptance by the body at large, so thanks to you as well. We stand in the threshold, ready to "be" church in new, life-shaping ways!

**Thank you to all.** I really appreciate all of my church friends who showered me with love and support following, my recent spinal surgery!

I received many caring phone calls, special cards, visits, and many meals whose delivery was organized by Carol Johnson. I am extremely lucky to be part of this wonderful church family.

*Sincerely, Shirley Osborne*

Thanks to Linda Ananian for energizing the church family to extend its welcome to family and friends of Eddie Charest during his wake. To all who made donations, helped set up, welcome, cleanup and transport leftovers to the funeral the following day, thank you. It is moments like this in the life of First Congregational Church of Reading, United Church of Christ, that make it the very special community that it is.

**Dear Shirley,**

Thank you for coordinating the Thursday, May 14<sup>th</sup> blood drive. We were very pleased with the drive overall, and the willingness of the donors to share this life saving gift.

The efforts of Reading Community has always been greatly appreciated and their support of the community blood program will go a long way toward replenishing blood supplies and ultimately saving lives.

In addition we very much appreciate your efforts during this crucial time. We had 53 donors and 51 units were collected at your drive.

Again, thank you for your contribution and ongoing support of this important community program. I look forward to working with you again on an upcoming blood drive

Kerry Enright – American Red Cross

Thank you so much for the Altar flower arrangement you gave me from last Sunday. I miss going to church but I appreciate all you do for so many people. God bless you all.

Molly Rowe

**The Outreach Committee** wishes to thank the members of Circle 5 for preparing a meal for Emmaus House on May 17<sup>th</sup>. Delicious Shepherd Pie, salad and desserts were delivered and enjoyed by many families.

Our committee is most grateful to all those who have prepared and taken food to Emmaus house over this past year. Thank you for your generous support

The Outreach Committee

**Congratulations to** Deb Adams on her graduation from Andover Newton Theological School. Deb graduated with honors.

Daily prayers are invited for all of our friends and members-especially those who are dealing with these special joys and concerns. They and their families are most grateful for your spiritual support and cards of greeting.



We pray for healing, recovery, and strength for:

✓ Bryce who was very ill and hospitalized this month. He is now home and is eating and drinking but he is not having much progress with his motor skills due to the loss of muscle tone during his illness. Please pray for strength for Bryce and for his family during this very stressful time.

✓ Mike Bailey, my daughter's brother-in-law diagnosed with stage 4 cancer. He grew up in Reading and has 4 children.

✓ Ann Cusolito for continued healing from surgery.

✓ Laurel Keith, a long-time member of this church, who broke a leg in a fall and is in rehab.

✓ Gardner Knapp for good healing of a broken hip.

We pray for those who are grieving:

✓ The family and friends of a friend who recently died of cancer.

✓ Eva Hakanson at the death of her sister.

✓ For Gay Williams' cousin Linda Carlson's family. Linda lost her heroic battle with brain cancer this week.

✓ Fran Doughty whose brother died.

✓ Family and friends of Eddie Charest.

We also pray for the following special concerns:

✓ Michelle Brown who is taking her Nursing exam.

There is much in our community for which we thank God and we pray in celebration for:

✓ Thanks for our wonderful choir.

✓ Thanks for the wonderful trip to Overlook Farm last Sunday.

✓ For all our service men and woman who died to give us our freedom.

✓ Thanks from the Carpenter family to everyone who provided us with delicious meals over the past few weeks. It made a hectic time a little easier.

✓ Bruce Oliver and Judy Austin who celebrated their birthdays this month.

✓ All Walk for Hunger participants which included Billy Tucker, Sarah Cruickshanks, and others.

✓ All the talented performers in the Third Annual FCCR Talent Show.

✓ All the good and faithful work done by the people of this church under the old church structure.

✓ Gratitude for my father's and brother's continued healing and thanks for the prayers and support of the church.

✓ Our caring, committed congregation who have embraced change for the coming year.

Our prayers continue for those who are in need of ongoing nursing care or assisted living:

✓ Bertha Babb (Susan Suarez's mother) at Bear Hill.

✓ Doris Torppa (Susan Torppa's mother) at Bear Hill.

✓ John Weston at Longwood Place.

✓ Libby Hodges at her son's in Connecticut.

And those who are cared for at home:

Jane Rice Peter Thorstensen

Molly Rowe Grace Faulkner

Please call the church office for these addresses if you would like to send a card or visit these friends.



## ALTAR FLOWERS

Given this month...

In loving memory of Leon E. Burns by his daughter, Cindy Dixon, her husband Dave and children.

In loving memory of Eva Corkery Buskirk, George Buskirk, Tom Corkery, and Peg and John Austin by the Austin family.

In loving memory of James Georgilas by Christine Georgilas and Jackie Rozett.

On Confirmation Sunday, the flowers are given in celebration of the confirmation of our young people as they continue with their spiritual journey.

calendar