

First Baptist Church, Littleton

"Journeying to God's Sacred Beat"

Winter Newsletter

November-December Doings

Thanksgiving

Count your blessings instead of your crosses.
Count your gains instead of your losses.
Count your joys instead of your woes.
Count your friends instead of your foes.
Count your smiles instead of your tears.
Count your courage instead of your fears.
Count your full years instead of your lean.
Count your kind deeds instead of your mean.
Count your health instead of your wealth.
Count on God instead of yourself.

Author: Unknown

Sunday, November 17

10am Rev. Dr. Michael Harvey,
Guest preacher

Saturday November 23 The Church Fall Fair

Here is how you can help:

- Bake, bake, bake
- **Stop by and buy something**
- Put up a poster around town
- **Put a poster in the back of your car**
- Tell your family and friends

For the Silent Auction could you donate something from your favorite merchant? Please speak to **Anne Lee Ellis** if you would like to help. If you have an item to donate to the silent auction speak to a member of the Finance Board.



Sunday November 24 Thanksgiving Worship

9am Sunday School

10am Worship with *March Forward* offering for Loaves and Fishes. See shopping list below.

7pm Interfaith Thanksgiving Service at St Anne Parish in Littleton

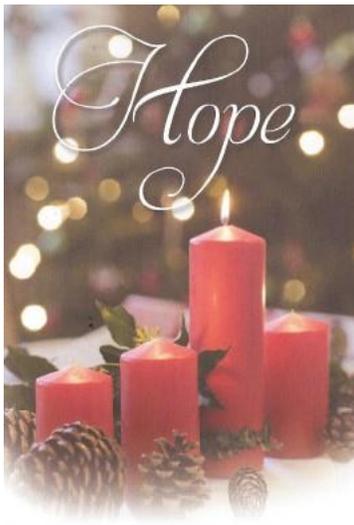


Thanksgiving Shopping List for Loaves and Fishes

TO DONATE: Food items below or checks made out to Loaves and Fishes. A \$50 donation will provide a holiday meal for a family of four. Your gifts will be gratefully accepted.

Our Most Needed Items for Thanksgiving:

- Turkeys – 16+ lbs.
- Chickens – 5 lbs.
- Broth and gravy
- 100% fruit juice
- Pies (apple, pumpkin – regulations prevent us from accepting homemade baked goods)
- Stuffing
- Cranberry sauce – canned
- Boxed potatoes and side dishes
- Cake mix and frosting
- Coffee, tea, and hot chocolate mix
- Fresh vegetables (white/sweet potatoes, onions, squash, carrots)
- Canned pumpkin
- Pineapple - sliced
- Nuts/popcorn/crackers/snacks



Sunday, December 1

First Sunday in Advent

The Candle of Hope

Christmas Open House during the Town Tree Lighting

4-6pm Teddy Bear Tree, Hot chocolate, cookie decorating, Train display



Sunday, December 8

Second Sunday in Advent

The Candle of Peace

9am Sunday School

10am Worship

Sunday, December 15

Third Sunday in Advent

The Candle of Joy

9am Sunday School

10am Children's Christmas program

December 22

Christmas Sunday

The Candle of Love

10am Special music

Rev. Cynthia Maybeck, Guest preacher

December 24

Christmas Eve

The Candle of Christ

7pm Teddy Bear

Christmas Service for excited children.

Bring your favorite Teddy Bear or stuffed animal for special music, carols, story and the lighting of Candles.

11pm **Traditional service** of candles, carols, scripture and story that will take us into the wee hours of Christmas morning



Christmas Eve

December 29

Sunday Breakfast Service at 10AM in the kitchen and fellowship hall. *All invited*

Pastor's COLUMN

Pastoral Daze

Death and Resurrection

Need an apartment? You might be interested in one of the fifteen apartments now available inside the former First Baptist Church of Whitman which closed its doors and was transformed into Bell Tower Place. For \$1100-\$1200 one can rent a one bedroom/one bath apartment in the heart of downtown Whitman which is within walking distance to the stores, banks, restaurants and commuter rail.

Churches are dying out and every week they are closing down, shuttering their doors or selling them to other organizations. Many are slowly slipping in a downward spiral as folks leave for greener pastures and no longer embrace the idea that church is

new
Life

something necessary for their life. For a variety of reasons folks are too busy, too tired, too angry or too indifferent to make a commitment to the institutional church and they seek new outlets of meaning for their lives.

Surveys, stories and blogs echo one another as they report on the struggle and decline of the church-at-large. People are in worship one week and then they are gone. And reports say they are staying away from places where judgment, condemnation and exclusion reside. They choose to stay clear

of people and activities which suck the energy right out of them while demanding their time and finances.

The church is dying. However the Good News is that where there is death - there is also resurrection, new birth and hope. While some churches will close down there are others that will find new life, new identities and new ways to serve God and grow in faith as they “love their neighbor as themselves.” Not all communities of faith will die.

After all we believe in resurrection - don't we?

We believe that God makes all things new - don't we?

We believe in new wineskins – don't we?

In Luke we read: “...no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins.” Luke 5:37-38. Christianity has *always* been about death and resurrection. We are a people of hope who believe that **something new** follows death.

Nadia Bolz-Weber, minister of the House of All Sinners and Saints, whom I quoted in the last church newsletter, writes that God is not trying to make us into nice, pious, or even good people, rather she has always felt that “God was about making *me new*.”

Bolz-Weber says “new doesn't always look perfect. Like the Easter story itself, new is often messy. New looks like recovering alcoholics. New looks like reconciliation

between family members who don't actually deserve it. New looks like every time I manage to admit I was wrong and every time I manage to not mention when I'm right. New looks like every fresh start and every act of forgiveness and every moment of letting go of what we thought we couldn't live without and then somehow living without it anyway. New is the thing we never saw coming – never even hoped for – but ends up being what we needed all along.” (Bolz-Webber, *Pastrix: The Cranky, Beautiful Faith Of A Sinner and Saint*, Jericho Books, 2013)

This is good news and reminds us that the trajectory or pattern of our faith journey is always one of death and resurrection. I believe death and resurrection will happen with the church-at-large as well. While many churches will close their doors others will find resurrection and new life as the faithful implement ways to be relevant and authentic.

Resurrection is already happening here at First Baptist Church of Littleton. It has *always* been happening at FBC and has been the operating force of love which makes moments of ministry happen. This has nothing to do with numbers and attendance figures. I have great faith in this community and I see God-at-work everywhere.

I see life - when people come for worship and gather around the table on Sunday mornings for education and discipleship.

I see life - when I see our children who love to come to church!

I see life - when the Welcoming and Affirming committee shares with one another and talks about being inclusive for the right spiritual reasons and not because we simply want it as a tool to bring in more people.

I see life - when I hear people like Constance Smithwood share that she has been coming here since 1960 and she would never think of leaving - even when she doesn't agree with something.

I see life – when I hear Lois Melillo tell me that she was so grateful to be back in worship, hear the music and see the children.

And I see life – when I see the church space being used by multiple groups day and night. *Wouldn't it be great if the space in the building was constantly being occupied a good part of a day and evening?* Thanks be to God that these walls on the common provide holy space for people to gather rather than apartment space for people to rent. I am not so sure that “Common Tower Place” in Littleton has a nice ring to it.

Onward, by all means.
Pastor Deb



... just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may **live a new life**. ROMANS 6:4

Boy to the World!

By Caroline Poser

It's only a game

This is a story I didn't know if I would ever tell because it does not have a happy ending.

However, a couple of recent events have got me thinking about it again. First of all, my youngest son decided he didn't want to play football anymore, mid-season. Normally I like my kids to see their commitments through, which is why I insisted they finish their t-ball seasons and if they didn't want to re-enlist in cub scouts, I wouldn't make them. Not signing up again is not the same as quitting. However, with football, if your heart isn't in it, you can get hurt. So, I let him quit, but I made him face the coaches and team and tell them himself. As we were leaving the field, I cried all the way to the car. "What's wrong, Mom?"

"I don't know, honey. It's only a game, right?" But I *did* know. It was because he wasn't fulfilling *my* dreams for him, and I knew how ridiculous that was, and I didn't want to burden him with it. I just wanted him to be happy.

The other event that triggered the need to tell the untold story is the poor sportsmanship of a football team that my oldest son played against recently. They're a good football team, no doubt about it, everybody knows it. They beat us. By a lot. But were the raucous insults the fans slung at us from the other side really necessary? It's only a game, people.

The unhappy-ending story is about the time one previous season when I had the opportunity to stand behind "enemy lines" during an afternoon football game.

That day I was "Playcounter: opposing side." That meant I had to go and hang around with the person counting plays for the other team. Depending on the size of the teams, each of the players on the roster has to have a certain number of plays every game. You can help figure out who's on the field (if needed) or just verify that the Playcounter is checking off names during every play, except kick return and extra points. The guy I was working with that day had a pretty good system, which was color coded by special teams, offense, and defense, and each of the teams had a mini roster, so if Head Coach called out "Eagle Five" (not the real name), a certain set of players would run out on the field, as listed on the color coded key. Clever. So, I really didn't have to do much of anything. I made a little small talk (what number is your son, do your other kids play sports, and so on), but very little, because when you're hanging around in that situation, not only is small talk unimportant, but also I wanted to be sure I didn't divulge anything I shouldn't. I had mentioned to Playcounting Dude that I didn't think we'd ever played their team before, and he concurred, it was the first time. I asked how their record was. "Four and two." "Hey, that's great, I have to confess I don't know what ours is." "Three and three," he informed me. I cringed and actually clamped my hand over my mouth to keep from saying anything else.

I was thinking about the game our team had played the week before, which was a terrible loss, and I hoped the team morale had recovered enough by then. Surely this team had heard about that as well, if they knew our record. They probably knew about all of our plays, too, and which of our players they should double team.

Apparently they did not know.

It seemed that they expected to run roughshod all over us. Instead, the opposite happened. We had a few plays that just worked, and we repeated them, and they worked again. And again. I was able to refrain from clapping and cheering the first time, but not so much the second or third or subsequent times. I apologized to Playcounting Dude. He said that's okay. I replied, "Yeah, I guess if your team did that you'd be cheering, too. You have to admit, it was a great play." He did have to admit, just as I had acknowledged their good plays, many of which involved their quarterback, who happened to be his son.

It soon became clear to me that what I thought was "only a game" was much more serious to all the coaches from the other team. The coaches began swearing, including Playcounting Dude, though he did apologize. I told him I'd heard those words before. They used up all their time outs in the first half. I had hoped we'd get everyone's plays in before the half, so I wouldn't have to go back to that side; it was becoming increasingly uncomfortable. But there were about five guys who still needed plays. So, after the half I went back.

In no time, the swearing resumed. Then throwing clipboards and towels. Then berating the kids. The kids who still needed plays didn't want to go in; they were afraid to make a mistake. Boys coming off the field were blaming their teammates. There were three or four coaches waving and yelling and swearing, but I think there was only one actually swearing at the boys.

The last straw for me was when one boy wanted to come off the field because his head hurt and the coach wanted him to stay



in and they started swearing at each other – including the F word – and the boy was kicked out of the game, all within five feet of

where I was standing. I froze, horrified. Playcounting Dude was seemingly shaken up as well.

"You can check off #4, I told him. He's out on the field." This may be the first useful thing I did. I wondered if he felt as helpless as I did.

The exiled boy had pitched his helmet and flung himself face down on the ground next to the bench and was sobbing. Surely it takes a lot for a middle-school-aged boy to cry in front of his team if he doesn't have a physical injury. *Where were that kid's parents?* I wondered. *Where were any of the kids parents?* There were plenty of other adults standing around behind me: *did they think it was okay for the coaches to yell at their kids like that?*

Playcounting Dude asked me if I had any Advil. I told him I did, but I'd left everything on the other side of the field.

"Do you mind getting it?"

"Not at all!" So, I ran back and forth as quickly as I could so as not to miss any plays— perhaps this was the second useful thing I did.

He gave them to the boy on the ground and told him to get a sip of water.

Breathless, I peered at the playcount sheet. Only a couple of kids needed plays. Finally, #4 was in for his last play. I didn't even bother to wait until it was executed; I signed off on the sheet and wished Playcounting Dude good luck for the rest of the season. As I passed the boy, still lying on the ground, I bent over and told him I hoped he felt better. I don't know if he heard me or even felt my touch on his shoulder through his pads. I'd like to think this was the third useful thing I did that day, but I don't know. *Should I have done more, said more?*

I still don't know the answer to that question.

What I do know is that my kids have never experienced that kind of coaching, thankfully, during any of the seasons they played or within any of the organizations for which they played. If they do, I vow here and now not to stand silently on the sidelines.

I also know that youth sports are supposed to be fun. They are not opportunities for us to have a do-over or live vicariously through our kids. If we are not part of the coaching

staff, there is no reason to be yelling advice from the sidelines or bleachers, unless it's something along the lines of "do your best."

Furthermore, I know it's only a game. There will always be another game next week...or next season.

From The Deacons

Did You Know About SMOC – A Fuel Assistance Program?

Did you know that there is a fuel assistance program available through SMOC (Southern Merrimack Opportunity Council)? The SMOC fuel assistance program is need based, and it is available to people of any age.



The assistance is substantial, and even though it may not pay your entire heating bill this winter, it could make a big difference in your budget. First Baptist Church of Littleton has the information you will need and is willing to help assist you in getting started. Forms must be filled out, and you should start as early as possible to have the best chance to receive assistance this year.

Applications can be filled out at the offices of the Council on Aging. Call the office of Human and Elder Services for additional information, assistance, and an appointment to get started with your application. The telephone number is 978-540-2470.



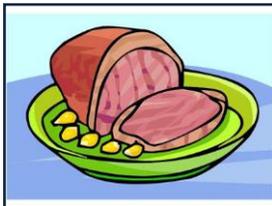
Thank You For...

In January our congregation will receive the annual Retired Ministers and Missionaries Offering. RMMO provides financial support to retired ministers, missionaries and widowed spouses who have helped to build our churches. But it is about much more than that. Through RMMO, American Baptist Churches have the opportunity to highlight our congregations' thankfulness for all of the ways our spiritual leaders have contributed to our lives as Christians.

As you consider your contribution please reflect on those who worship among us and those who have served our church in the past and helped to bless and influence our individual faith experiences.

"I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers."
Ephesians 1:16

Ham & Bean Suppers



March 1
Diaconate Board
April 5
Mission/Music



Women's Fellowship

Sun., Jan. 12 - Epiphany Party
Following coffee hour

Fri., March 14 - PMS Party
(Popcorn, Movie and Sundae) 7:00 PM

Sat., May 24 - Canon Theatre, Littleton
A Funny Thing Happened on the Way To The Forum 7:30 PM

~~
Christmas Flowers Order Form 2013



The time to order Poinsettias for Christmas will be here in no time.

- The cost this year is \$14/plant.
- Plan to order a plant in memory or honor of someone special to you.
- Please give orders and payment to one of the Chancel Team Members: Lynda Fisher, Dawn Gravlin, Marge Payne, Harriet DiLuzio or Carol Huebner.

Orders may be mailed to: Carol Huebner, 17 Sherwood Drive, Westford, MA 01886
Checks should be made payable to "Deacons Fund"

The order deadline is December 15th.
Quantity _____

Your Name: _____

Phone: _____

Please include the words of recognition you would like to use in the bulletin.
In memory of (or use your own words)

United Missions Why I Give to Our Denomination



By The Rev. Steve Youd

If you are like me, your financial resources have some limits on them. Each of us has to (and should!) examine to whom we give, and, WHY we give. For years, I have given to our denomination, and still hold it high in my charitable giving. Let me share “WHY” I give from 3 vantage points: as a parent, as a pastor, and as a staff person.

As A Parent: When I initially came to Massachusetts, the first ministry my family and I got involved in was the Christian Youth Conference (CYC), held every summer in August at Oceanwood. It is the longest- running 2 week Christian conference for youth in North America. And for good reason: it changes the lives of young people. While there, both of my kids made firm (and continuing!) spiritual decisions. CYC is one of the premier reasons why my kids have an ongoing commitment to their respective local churches. And, they made friends there that will last a lifetime.

Many denominations are closing their camps because they often require subsidization. Fortunately, our denomination sees doing so as an investment. Our denomination works hard to “operate in the black,” but on those rare occasions where a little help is needed to ensure that **Oceanwood and Grotonwood** continue to touch lives, the help is there. And if that is not enough, when young people have needed financial aid to attend camp, the denomination (as recently as 2013) provided over \$100,000 in youth scholarships so that no child would be denied a camping experience. **I feel good about giving to a denomination that has VISION.**

As A Pastor: In the late 1980’s and early 1990’s, I was part of a church start-up on Cape Cod. While there, the denomination provided funding for our land, and quite frankly, to pay my salary during start-up. And, when the building got built and we were scratching for every cent, the denomination helped us pay our mortgage through a grant of the George Wright Fund. It is now years later, and I am happy to report that the church is now self-sufficient, and thriving. This was thanks, in large part, to the support of the denomination at a time when it was absolutely essential.

One of the things I appreciate most about our denomination is its commitment to hands-on mission.

In the early 90’s, I went on my first mission trip - - to La Romana in the Dominican Republic. To say it was a life-altering event for me would be an understatement. I was there when we laid the first block for what was to become The Good Samaritan Hospital - - a facility that saw 60,000 patients last year - - largely serving the Haitian population on the Dominican side of the island. That dream was made a more-sure reality when our denomination appointed and funded a missionary there - - Kristy Engle, who coordinated countless work teams, and initiated medical teams to go to the poorest villages.

Another reason I give to our denomination is because I have personally benefited from the services of the TABCOM staff. I had gone on a mission tour to Honduras where I was very impressed with the dreams of our mission partner to help educate impoverished children. Before leaving the country, I promised the mission partner that I would return, and with leaders who could help him

realize his dream. The only problem was: I had no CLUE as to how I would pull that off. But, when upon arriving back in the United States, I did one of the smartest things I've ever done, I called Ed Guerard, who was then holding the position I now hold. He spent copious amounts of hours with me, helping me strategize, and, helping me write a voluminous number of fundraising letters. Today, there is a school in Honduras that serves 300 young people - - guiding them intellectually, spiritually and nutritionally. I can firmly say that it would not have been done without the help of Ed Guerard, our Mission Minister.

As A Staff Person: During my short tenure as a member of the TABCOM staff, I have seen countless things that make me proud to be an American Baptist.

- I've seen how hard the staff works in pastoral placement.
- I've seen the CARE they take in working with candidates on their path to ordination.
- I've seen the pain and perseverance of the staff when working with conflicted churches.
- I've been present when we have facilitated funding for a community needing disaster relief.
- I've felt their support when building the Mission Works conference and the Mission Advocates program.

I've seen their commitment to make the world a better place through their hearty endorsement of:

- MissionAdventures - - a plan to bring laity & clergy to 5 parts of the world that are hurting, beginning right here in the United States of America.

I've seen their desire to move in new directions like:

- Workshops on Social Media & The Church
- Free Seminars on "Attracting Younger Families" & "A Stewardship Approach That Works!"
- Helping Churches Who Share Facilities To Not Only Get Along, But To PARTNER

And, I am grateful for a denomination that cares about helping pastors in retirement planning. (My high school pastor, whom I loved, and who served another denomination - - one which had NO RETIREMENT PROGRAM for their pastors - - had to work, even while deathly sick, into his 80's.)

The guidance of the Minister and Missionaries Benefit Board is invaluable.

This is not ANY kind of an inclusive list. I could point to countless other programs and initiatives (egs., The Pines, Retreats for Returning Veterans, Outreach to and with the Deaf, the work of the American Baptist Foundation, our support of Multi-Cultural Ministry, and our passion to lead people to Christ - - to name a few).

When You Give To These, Here Is What Happens:

- United Mission (2/3 of your gift stays in the region; 1/3 goes to support national & international ministry)
- Massachusetts Ministry Fund (100% of your gift stays here in the region)
- Friends of Regional Ministries (This fund, supported by individuals, fully stays - - 100% - - in the region.)