



# Markings

A publication of South Acton Congregational Church

JANUARY 2017

From Liz  
Happy New Year!!

Here we are at the start of a new secular year. The new year in Christianity actually starts with the first Sunday in Advent, so this new year is already five weeks old. In Judaism the new year is Rosh Hashanah, which celebrates the sixth day of Creation, when God created humans. The Jewish and Islamic New Years were in October this year. Personally I've always wondered why we don't think of the new year in the spring, when life seems new?

Of course there are many things new at SACC right now. A new search team, new worship/music team, imagining new ways to manage communication and outreach, new energy at the Center, new shared ministries with Boxboro. We have a new government in place, and new semesters starting in school, and new aches and pains for the new year. No wonder sometimes our response to the new year is to take a long nap!!

We read from the book of Revelation at Christmas. Here it is from the Message (a new bible translation). I heard a voice thunder from the Throne: "Look! Look! God has moved into the neighborhood, making home with men and women! They're God's people, The LORD is their God. God will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death is gone for good—tears gone, crying gone, pain gone—all the first order of things gone." The Enthroned continued, "Look! I'm making everything new. Write it all down—each word dependable and accurate." Rev. 21:3-5.

What would it mean to imagine that God has moved into your neighborhood? Are there things you would do differently if you thought God lived down the street? I'm not thinking of worrying about whether God will judge your actions or thoughts—what if God was waiting to take you out for coffee and had some time to chat? What if God was longing to give you a hug?

Of course some of me would love a chance to give God a piece of my mind. There is so much God has not fixed in the world, so much loss, so much loneliness, so much pain. The God I grew up with—the one who was supposed to fix everything—that God would not be fun to have coffee with. Honestly that God is a failure in my book.

But of course it was that image of God-as-fixit-guy that failed, not the God that Jesus points us to. The God that Jesus points to is a God that is in every person who needs food, drink, housing, clothing, healing, and release from prison. The God that Jesus points to is a God that loves us the way we are. The God that Jesus points to wipes tears from our eyes and holds us close.

And that God is making everything new. In this new year, imagine that God is making home with us. Invite God in for a chat. Happy New Year.

-Liz

## *From The Deacons*

It has been a busy, rushed, joyous, melancholy Christmas season, or in other words, a typical Christmas season. The deacons continued with their tradition of bringing homemade Christmas cookies to various members of the SACC family to help bring good cheer and make sure they knew they knew their SACC family was thinking of and appreciated them. There were also all the other SACC Christmas activities; with the annual Sunday school Christmas pageant (I would have to say it was one of my favorites even with none of my family in it), the caroling/pot luck/contra dance, Ed's now

traditional Christmas music piano concert, and the Christmas Eve candle light services. This year also saw a new twist with a Christmas Sunday church service, and not just your regular service. Attendees were welcome to come in their pajamas or otherwise. While I went otherwise, we did have a mix of young and old take advantage of the PJs option. In addition, the parts of the service were presented in random order as drawn from a cup (both hymns and spoken word) and the service included the second part to the sermon started on Christmas Eve (Christ as human and as

divine). Everyone was kept on their toes and music not know what part was coming next. It worked well and everyone enjoyed the service and sharing Christmas morning together. Thanks to all the people that made these events take place and those who participated in them. They really are a group effort and that adds to our wonderful church experience of the Christmas holiday. Remember, if there are any issues or needs you wish to bring to the attention of the deacons you can contact your assigned deacon (see below) or let me know at [DeaconChair@SouthActonCC.org](mailto:DeaconChair@SouthActonCC.org)

### Last Name

A & B Amber Klauer  
C & E Sarah Bradbury  
D, F & G Bob Van Meter  
H thru K Judy Hodge

### Last Name

L thru N Laurie Thibodeau  
O thru S Angela Aaronson  
T thru Z Steve Hadden

## *Congregational News*

Happy New Year! The Congregational Board has been busy working with the stewardship committee and the search committee in figuring out what we can afford in a minister based on our current pledge income. Stay tuned for further information. We will be having a Congregational Budget Meeting on Sunday, January 29 after church, please

try to attend. We are also working hard on bringing our financial systems up to the 21st century technology. It's a large amount of work right now, but will be better for us in the long run. Rev. Karen McArthur, Congregational Finance, has been a wonderful resource for us and is getting on the right track. As we continue to go through this time of transition,

please remember that the congregational board is here for you - contact us with questions at any time.  
Pam Rogers  
Congregational Board Chair

*Other Members of the Congregational Board:*  
*Jim Willis, Joan Fischer, Russ Bosbach, Peter Babcock, Bee Baker, Gina Ghioldi*

## *Liz Reflects on Endowments*

What's an endowment for?

I know a couple in their early 90's who have saved a fair amount of money, in addition to their pension. Although their apartment is part of a senior living complex, and their health is failing, they will not pay for help. Mom watches TV all day because she cannot walk and will not hire an assistant to take her to the nearby craft and card-playing groups in their building. Dad downplays his own medical problems because it takes so much time for him to care for mom.

Meanwhile, their kids watch in dismay. While there are stories of kids who want to inherit their parents' wealth, these kids want their mom and dad to be enjoying their last years. They want their parents to pay for the help they need, to pay for things that will allow them to have fun, and for things that will make their lives easier. Mom and dad are saving money, but for what? What is savings for? They are saving money, but losing out on life experiences.

SACC has a savings of around \$240,000. Our endowment is completely unrestricted funds, much of

it from the sale of the parsonage. It is time for us to engage the discussion of what is the purpose of our endowment. What are we saving for?

There are several common approaches to a non-restricted fund. One is to use the earnings from the fund as part of the regular budget, but to avoid using the principal of the fund. Some churches take the actual returns from the previous year, or some withdraw the average return over the past 3 or 5 years, others withdraw a set amount (typically 4 to 5%) each year. Limiting the "draw" to actual earnings after they are earned is the "safest" approach for protecting the principal, while taking a set percentage is the "safest" approach for keeping the budget predictable. The theory of taking a set amount, or an average return, is that the excess left in the fund on the good years will balance excess taken out in the bad years; it also means that staff salaries and committee budgets do not go up and down unpredictably.

Mom and dad worked to build up a savings account while they were working.

They added to it when they sold their house. But once they retired, they continued to try to add to their savings, instead of using the earnings to do fun, and life protecting, things. Any of the above strategies would have been great for mom and dad from the day of their retirement until their health reached the stage that they needed to pay for support services.

Another approach treats the endowment principal as a "rainy day" or "emergency" fund rather than as untouchable. When there is a short term budget short fall, a building expense, or a significant crisis, the principal is used to cover the emergency expense. Theoretically when the emergency is over there will be a fundraising campaign to bring the fund back to its normal levels.

Of course if the emergency is a slowly dying congregation eventually the fund will be used up. If the congregation is doing good ministry in the world as it draws on the fund this should not be seen as a disaster—if the funds were given in order to save for a "rainy day" then when it rains it should, in fact, be used for ministry.

For mom and dad, the rainy day is here. The “future”—that is their kids—don’t want the money saved for later. They want mom and dad to have what they need now. Churches that are saving for “the future” sometimes let the church of today fail because they want to save money for later. Later won’t happen if the church doesn’t have enough to keep going now!

Unlike people, the end of a church story is not necessarily death. There is nothing mom and dad can choose to spend money on that would prevent their eventual death, but there are things that a congregation can spend money on that may stop its eventual death. A congregation can choose to spend money, even

money from its endowment, in order to further its mission.

A loving, welcoming congregation like SACC can use money to help it get healthier, to do more outreach, to help it get a “restart” for new life. Money designated for outreach—advertising, pastor’s hours, programming money—could help turn around SACC, could make us a congregation known in the community. The money might be what is needed to get us to vitality.

To spend endowment money on our vision is a risky investment—it is as likely to fail as it is to succeed. But the choice isn’t between a \*safe\*

investment and a \*risky\* one. To decide to continue on, protecting our endowment and hoping that we find a new way to be church is a risky choice. To decide to make a change, to spend some of our endowment hoping that we will find a new way to be church is a risky choice. The question is this: which risk do choose?

Don’t miss our all congregational meeting (whether or not you are member) after church on January 29 from 11:45 to 1pm.

-Liz

## *From the Search Committee*

Your Search Committee is honored to have been chosen to find our next pastor who will walk with us on our spiritual journey. We’ve met a few times since our commissioning on October 30th, and plan to meet regularly going forward, next meeting being January 5<sup>th</sup>. So far, we’ve focused on getting to know each other and working on the Church Profile which we need to put together and eventually circulate amongst

pastor candidates. Katie Bradbury and Judy McKendry put the profile document on google drive which was helpful, making it possible for all of us to work on it independently when we are not together. After the January 29<sup>th</sup> Congregational Budget meeting we will be able to add those financial components to the profile.

On the large wood board on the wall in the vestry (it was

once the photo board), we have the Search Committee names up and we’ll be putting up a card for each meeting we have to let everyone know what we are working on. But you can always ask us – please do!

Patti Babcock, on behalf of your Search Committee  
Patti Babcock, Katie Bradbury, Curt Logee, Judy McKendry, Kendra Magyar, Sean Osborne, Isabelle Thourot

## *Worship in January*

### **January 1**

First Sunday after Christmas  
Matthew 25:31-46 (The Sheep and Goats)  
Pastor Liz reports on her dissertation  
Communion Sunday

### **January 8**

Epiphany  
Matthew 2:1-12 (The Wise Guys visit Jesus)  
Children's sermon "The rest of the Christmas Pageant"

### **January 15**

Second Sunday of Epiphany  
Matthew 3:13-17 (The Baptism of Jesus)  
(Worship and Music Planning from 12-1)

### **January 22**

Third Sunday of Epiphany (Karen Hodges Preaching)  
Matthew 4:12-23 (Jesus calls Disciples)

### **January 29**

Fourth Sunday of Epiphany  
Matthew 5:1-12 (The Beatitudes: blessed be!)

## *Cleaning Teams for January*

1/7 Judy Hodge's Team  
1/14 Becky Hadden's Team  
1/21 Marilyn Dow's Team  
1/28 Pam Rogers' Team

## *A Note from Charlotte Weatherbee*

*Merry Christmas to all my friends at Church. Thanks for all you do.  
Bless you all.*

*Love, Charlotte*

# McLean Hospital Thank You

A note from Val Hadden sent on December 12<sup>th</sup>.

Thank you, wonderful people who donated gifts to the teens at McLean Hospital, and thank you, wonderful people who helped them get transported there!

The many many donated gifts were dropped off at Carol Brown's office at McLean this morning. She and others spent today wrapping them, and the teens who have to be inpatient right now will receive them. Carol emailed me, and I want to pass her thanks on to you:

*I can't believe what you did – excellent work. These kids are going to have the best Holiday yet because of you!!! The gifts are wonderful and each teen will get one or two. Have a wonderful holiday  
Carol*

Thank you everyone and have a very happy holiday!  
Val Hadden

## Cleaning Team Organizer Needed from Becky Hadden

Cleaning Team scheduling is such an easy job; I do it every year (maybe 20 years) without much effort—but also without much creativity or enthusiasm. I would love it if someone would come forth to take over this scheduling job. All it takes is a little computer work to set up the schedule and an email to everyone. What really takes effort and I am not successful with is the bringing in of new people and enlivening the whole endeavor. We do indeed save the church thousands of dollars pretty simply. Please be thinking about whether you could take over this job of Cleaning Team Organizer. I would be very grateful and you would find yourself having a new but not overwhelming challenge. Ask me more if you're interested. I can tutor you—you'll be amazed!!!

You all know that the cleaning teams' faithful effort has kept our church in lovely condition for years. I never worry or fret. They are all as responsible as the day is long!!! This is a great program where we all take responsibility for the cleanliness of our dear SACC. Thank you to everyone who participates for always monitoring the cleaning materials, adding your own sometimes, letting me know when little problems arise, cleaning floors and refrigerators, and taking away the trash. I love the way everyone has his/her own pet cleaning peeve that addresses all the possible dirt collectors and makes them clean again

### Also from Becky Hadden.

Becky and Steve's son Kenny grew up in this church and is now the Worship Coordinator for the Presbyterian Church of Jackson Hole, Wyoming. He wrote the following for his church Newsletter and they would like to share it with all of us.

## Music as Prayer by Kenny Hadden

Connecting with God is mysterious. God is described as the transcending of earthly desires as well as their fulfillment, impossibly greater than us yet intimately intertwined with our lives. All of this is true, and more. To connect with that great enigma, we seek God's presence within ourselves. And to isolate God's presence, we must know our humanness and get it out of the way. So like God's enigmatic nature, prayer requires both acute focus on who we are and practiced forgetfulness of ourselves.

I am frequently amazed and disappointed at my own distractedness. As I try to pray, my mind darts here and there, rarely focusing and connecting with God. God desires an intimate relationship with me, and yet I routinely push God out of prayer time with anxious thoughts, logistics, judgments, and more.

The best way I have found to quiet those thoughts and truly focus on connecting

with the divine is to sing. I am not able to sing a song and simultaneously worry about my to-do list or stew about the last argument I had. There just isn't room in my mind for both. And it's incredible how even just a few seconds into singing a meaningful song, I often find myself in tears, deeply connected to my true self and with the Holy Spirit within me.

This can be scary. God is a powerful force, and you don't always know what will happen when you become deeply connected with that force. It requires a willingness to give up control and be vulnerable. My hope is that our worship services are a safe space to take that risk. The beautiful thing is that when it happens, it's not nearly as scary as you expected. It's like driving down the road with the windows down, singing your favorite song at the top your lungs and forgetting to care if anyone can hear you.