



# FCCC Annual Report 2015

Franconia Community Church of Christ  
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Dear Friends,

I was blessed at a recent meeting to hear a poem read aloud by Beth Towle. It's called "Fire," and it was written by Judy Brown, a Quaker poet and educator.

It offers a beautiful and wise reflection on our need for certain kinds of open spaces within ourselves and within our communities. It speaks of how we are best able to burn brightly, to flourish as flame, when breathing space is present, along with the weightier material that we also require in life. Her lyric offers hope for the kinds of freedom, health, and authentic power that can come with not being overstuffed by too much of anything, including the very best things.

Greater breathing-room can also bless a *collective* body such as a church. A gathered body made up of individuals is just as dependent, perhaps even more so, on a healthy balance between unclaimed, unoccupied free space within, and the denser, weightier matter of things to be digested, or debated, or done.

And, while Judy's poem is about *burning* wood, breathing room is just as crucial when *building* wood.

If we are responsible for a woodlot, our best and most sustainable timber harvests come with an ongoing duty of selective cutting and clearing. We do this to distribute light, moisture, nutrients and root-room in ways that make for strong overall growth, and quick recovery after harvest, storm damage or infestation. In addition, we may promote health and diversity in the other creatures that call the woodlot home.

And what if we're not the foresters, but the trees? As individual trees, you or I might from time to time find ourselves in real need of breathing space. For example, I can relate to the predicament faced by a fig tree spoken of by Jesus in a parable, found in the 13th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

*"A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard. He came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener,*

*'See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none.*

*Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?'*

*[The gardener] replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'*"

"Fire" by Judy S. Brown

What makes a fire burn  
is space between the logs,  
a breathing space.  
Too much of a good thing,  
too many logs  
packed in too tight  
can douse the flames  
almost as surely  
as a pail of water would.

So building fires  
requires attention  
to the spaces in between,  
as much as to the wood.

When we are able to build  
open spaces  
in the same way  
we have learned  
to pile on the logs,  
then we can come to see how  
it is fuel, and absence of the fuel  
together, that make fire possible.

We only need to lay a log  
lightly from time to time.  
A fire grows  
simply because the space is there,  
with openings  
in which the flame  
that knows just how it wants to burn  
can find its way.

*The Sea Accepts All Rivers & other poems*  
Trafford Publishing, 2016.

In the King James version, the gardener's plea for another chance for the tree is even more simply phrased. He just asks for a chance to "*dig about it and dung it.*"

An interesting sidelight on this parable comes from other cultures around the world who have rituals meant to persuade struggling trees to increase their yield. Here is a classic example from *The Golden Bough* by James Frazer:

The durian-tree of the East Indies, whose smooth stem often shoots up to a height of eighty or ninety feet without sending out a branch, bears a fruit of the most delicious flavour and the most disgusting stench. The Malays cultivate the tree for the sake of its fruit, and have been known to resort to a peculiar ceremony for the purpose of stimulating its fertility. . . [On] a specially chosen day . . . one of the local sorcerers would take a hatchet and deliver several shrewd blows on the trunk of the most barren of the trees, saying, "Will you now bear fruit or not? If you do not, I shall fell you."

To this the tree replied – through the mouth of another man who had climbed a mangostin-tree hard by (the durian-tree being unclimbable) – "Yes, I will now bear fruit; I beg of you not to fell me."

Frazer says that similar Scare-the-Tree rituals are also used in many other traditional cultures, from Japan to Eastern Europe:

"On Christmas Eve many a South Slavonian and Bulgarian peasant swings an axe threateningly against a barren fruit-tree . . . Thrice the axe is swung, and thrice the impending blow is arrested . . . After that the frightened tree will certainly bear fruit next year."

But here's a question: How much has deep fear blessed or improved *your* life lately? When you or I find ourselves in daunting situations in our lives, perhaps there are occasions when fear can be a helpful motivator, at least temporarily. But fear is surely not what promotes a good and sustainable harvest of sweetness from plants or from people. And when the fruits required are the kind that must come from a place of deep engagement, intimidation is definitely not the best way to encourage their growth.

That is why I find it illuminating, and also challenging, that Jesus' gardener reaches not for his **axe** but for his **shovel**. Of course he probably does have an axe in his shed, sharpened and ready for work. He is probably skilled with it, when an axe is what is really needed. But by bringing the shovel to the tree, the will of the gardener is not to threaten the tree, but rather "to dig about it and dung it."

That is a plan for restoring hope by restoring balance, and it is the very opposite of intimidation. But how can the gardener restore balance to the tree when he seems not to know exactly which element is lacking?

In a way, the gardener is not doing the restoring himself, only promoting conditions that make restoration possible. He does just enough spadework to put the ingredients for a restored balance within the tree's reach, within the reach of its roots. By digging around the tree, and adding manure, the gardener offers a non-coercive opportunity for healing and revitalization. Then, all during that year, the tree can hopefully re-connect with its own needs, and with its own best capacities for productivity and giving sweet fruit.

Maybe the tree has been starving for three years specifically for the nutrients found in that shovelful of manure. That is, maybe it just hasn't been "dunged" enough lately. Or maybe not. Maybe the problem is that the soil has become so tightly packed at the base of the tree, and around its roots, that the breathing-room for receiving and exchanging vital stuff of earth, water and air is gone. What if the rather dull annual work of "digging around" has been neglected somewhat by the gardener's assistants after prior fruitful years? Over time, the invisible but vital breathing space between rootlets and droplets and bits of soil might have been squeezed out and eliminated. Below ground, and out of sight, packed-down dirt could have made the good stuff far less less life-giving and helpful than it was intended to be.

Unsurprisingly, in the eyes of most people above ground — including the owner — there is no excuse. To the owner, who was neither perceiving nor imagining what was going on under the surface, it surely looked like the tree had been getting all that it needed to give sweet figs abundantly and generously.

So perhaps the key is that the gardener is ready to do three specific things, all at the same time:

- 1) to acknowledge the real basis of the owner's frustration
- 2) to apply a deeper insight into the fig tree's own situation
- 3) to do some simple, humble yet profound work to foster healing and growth, to meet the real needs of all

The gardener understands that fruitfulness and sweetness are indeed required, and that there is a finite amount of time before a judgment will be rendered. But the gardener is also able to imagine that the tree might be dealing with an invisible struggle. Maybe the gardener can identify with the stress which *any* living being must feel when it is just surviving rather than thriving! Maybe the gardener has empathy for anything at risk of being condemned and discarded.

The fig tree's present health and yield are not enough for its long-term survival. The gardener knows that life is short, and time is limited. But, in case something has been overlooked, he will make sure that good nourishment, and the freedom to take it in, are unmistakably within reach for a meaningful period of time before the day of judgment. Breathing-space and time, such easily-neglected and invisible things — intangibles so typically slighted in the midst of anything that feels like a crisis — these are to be given in good measure. Nourishing gifts, given with hope, allowed to ripen. Then a decision will be made.

Okay, great, now we've got insight into the poetics, or metaphysics — or whatever — of the formation and burning of wood! As a wise woman once said, "That, and \$1.89, will get you a medium coffee."

But the poem and the parable are sticking with me, and I hope they will for a long time. I have recently become more painfully aware that I sometimes reach too quickly and too angrily for an axe when the gentler art of spadework is needed. At times this year, I've been fetching or grinding an axe in spite of Jesus' efforts to coax it from my grasp, offering me his gardener's shovel to use in its place. And there are times when the same dynamic shows up in aspects of our behavior as a church as well. This Lent is a good time for me to work on my pastoral "digging-around" skills, and also for seeking the *humility* — which literally means "closeness to the soil" — which good work of that kind requires. And, I pray to be more lovingly fruitful, and more giving of sweetness. And there are opportunities for similar development for us as a congregation as well.

The poem and the parable can also guide practices of care and self-care into being more truly grounded in reality. Sometimes we seem to be quite oblivious to very basic needs, in ourselves and in others. Picture this: two trees are at a restaurant table, reading their menus. One says to the other, "I'm trying to decide between water and sunlight." I love that! (It's a cartoon by Liana Finck from the January 4 issue of the *New Yorker*.) It's silly, but, as with the "top three" essentials — Faith, Hope and Love — which Paul shared with his pen-pal churches, we can sometimes appear to believe that we're just fine with two out of three, or one out of three, or maybe even none. It's awfully easy to neglect the sharing of one or more of those with a friend, or with a stranger, or even with ourselves. It's so easy that it can quickly become a habit. At some point, though, as that habit becomes ingrained in the wood of our being, we may notice that some life-fruits are not forming quite the way we had anticipated. Or, from a different angle, maybe we find that there's a hoped-for fire that's just smoking and smoldering, but not really catching.

I thank God for calling us to be a church where each can seek the blessed breathing-room that we truly need to thrive, and out of which sweeter love can grow. Let's let Jesus teach me and you to be ever more patient and generous in offering the same open, nourishing freedom to all whom we are called to serve.

Thank you and God bless you, Barry

## 2015 Annual Report on the Youth Group

We have enjoyed another good year with the awesome youth of our church! We began the year with our 6<sup>th</sup> annual Mardi Gras Youth Group Pancake Supper in February, along with an informal and moving service in the Sanctuary which ended with the making of ashes for Ash Wednesday. Then, at the conclusion of our Lenten Season, we had a Youth Group Easter Vigil Supper and Worship Service on Holy Saturday, the night before Easter Sunday.

We were again invited by the Bethlehem Hebrew Congregation to participate in their Holocaust Remembrance service at the end of April, and all of us were deeply moved by the experience of joining our voices and prayers with those of our neighbors. We remembered the Holocaust perpetrated by the Nazi regime, along with many other devastating atrocities and injustices, and committed ourselves to being memory keepers, holding firm to the commitment to remember but not repeat these tragedies, and passing on that commitment to those who will come after us.

We are always proud of our youth, who are quickly maturing into amazing young adults, some already flourishing far from home for much of the year! It was especially gratifying to work with these young people as together we organized and led our Vacation Bible Camp during the third week of June. Their commitment, maturity, creativity, and leadership skills were the keys to a successful and enjoyable camp experience for over 45 young people! They are truly the best of role models, and have made impressions on young campers who will remember those experiences for a long time to come!

We also, of course, enjoyed our supper meetings in the Jack Leech Hall as often as their busy schedules would permit. These gatherings always include fun food, meaningful conversation, worship, Bible study and games. We also enjoyed a cookout followed by particularly moving communion service together just before Barry and I left for our sabbatical. Pastor Steve ran the Youth Group while we were away, organizing movie nights and hikes enjoyed by all!

We met again with the youth at the beginning of Advent, and were so blessed to have the youth contribute to the Christmas Pageant, Children's and Adult Christmas Eve services, and the Dinner Bell meal during the busy Christmas season! It was a real treat at those events to have Preston, Emily, and Liz return and join in the festivities!

It is a joy and an honor to spend time with these amazing young people, and we look forward to more fun, more devotional time, more learning, and more great conversations in 2016!

Submitted by Amy Welch and Barry Jacobson

## 2015 Annual Report on the Church School

What a true joy and privilege it is to work with the children of our church! I have had the blessing of watching toddlers grow up into elementary students, and elementary students growing up into middle schoolers, with each and every one growing, with each passing year, in the knowledge and love of God!

The Church School has continued to have a small but loyal following, with visitors joining us on many Sundays. Each Sunday morning in the Church School is filled with stories, prayers, a collection, games, and crafts, and sharing of ourselves with one another! The older children willingly help the younger ones, and there is always a warm welcome to all visitors.

During 2015 we continued focusing upon Bible stories, dwelling in each story over a period of weeks so that each story could be fully absorbed and recalled. One particularly fun unit was on Daniel and the Lion's Den. The kids decided to put on a brief skit for the congregation, complete with lion masks that they had made. No one who saw it will soon forget the lesson that wishing (and plotting!) harm to someone else, as the villains in the story did to Daniel, can end badly for oneself!

We also had our annual field trip to the Maple Experience at the Rocks Estate, which was enjoyed by everyone who attended. The blessings of God in nature are never sweeter than when eating a doughnut dipped in maple syrup!! These trips are not only an opportunity to learn and enjoy the outdoors, but also a chance to feel and reinforce our joyful group spirit as FCCC Church Schoolers!

The Church School also continued its commitment to the Heifer Project this year, raising \$200 to donate during Christmastime. The children chose to give: a share of a pig, a flock of chicks, a flock of ducks, a goat, and honeybees, which we pray will greatly enhance and bless the lives of the families who receive them!

Truly the Holy Spirit is present each week as we join together, and enjoy one another, as members of God's family! All of us can feel very proud of the children in this church, who continue to grow in faith and love!

Submitted by Amy Welch, Church School Coordinator

## 2015 Treasurer's Comments

The Trustees managed to bring in spending to \$253,987 slightly below the \$259,412 in approved spending for 2015. There were a number of additional expenses to complete the accessibility project as well as additional expenses for the Pastor sabbatical. The overall spending for the church for 2015 totaled \$253,987.

Total Church offerings, interest, and general support was budgeted at \$104,725 while the actual income to these categories totaled \$65,915. Offerings were the primary income category but did not include over \$30,000 in donated stock that was transferred to the church Schwab account. General offerings were off by \$6,853

For 2016 the Trustees budget for spending increased by \$2,102 to a total planned spending of \$261,514. Overall the Trustees feel this supports the ministry and mission of the church.

I hope that over the coming year we can continue our efforts to invite more to the church community and as well to build a foundation that will benefit the community for the next 200 years.

## 2015 Trustees Report

Over the past year the Trustees completed the Church Accessibility project. This project among other things provided the church's community to modern access to the main floor and basement by way of a lift. Additionally, a modern meeting room, bathroom and office made the church inviting to members and the public at large. A new modern heating plant, generator and lighting will serve church members for years to come as they enter the church. The project and as well the planning were completed below anticipated budgets of \$370,000. The actual spending was approximately \$352,000. The project was aided by Dodge contracting and as well EH Danson. The Trustees will be working over the coming months to ensure the use of the new additions are fulfilling and supporting the churches ministries and missions. We successfully received over \$30,000 in 2015 to offset the carrying costs of this new project and over the next year will continue to raise funds to further offset the capital costs of this new addition.

Over the coming months the Trustees will be working on establishing and reviewing staff job descriptions to ensure all paid and volunteer staff have appropriate position descriptions that meet all modern standards. Additionally, there will be a few maintenance projects including pressure washing the church and outside beautification that the Trustees would like to tackle.

As always we are here to serve. Please let us know of your concerns and or ideas. We want to support and foster the growth of the church as we envisioned when starting the accessibility project in 2014. Let's rejoice as a church for these accomplishments in 2015.

Submitted by David Weed

## 2015 Pastor Parish Relations Committee

*Last February and March the PPRC met with 25 members and friends of FCCC to review where we were with an eye to gathering insight on moving forward. The results of these conversations were put into the report that follows. The report was presented at our December Council meeting.*

### **The FCCC Pastor Parish Relations Review Summary**

Our goal as we started this process was to pursue thoughtful introspection and self-evaluation of the Franconia Community Church of Christ as it is today and to help us establish goals for our future together. We wanted to focus on all aspects of the church as a community and its role and place in the broader community. We utilized a process defined in the book *Completing the Circle: Reviewing Ministries in the Congregation* by David R. McMahill to help us assess how we are serving each other and the broader community. The steps included a series of meetings where members and friends were invited to participate in a discussion about their experiences and thoughts related to the FCCC. Twenty-five individuals (**thank you!**) joined us for 4 meetings where over 175 comments were made and recorded. What follows is a summary of what we gathered and learned in those meetings juxtaposed (against/with) our understanding of patterns of operation and behavior that are in some cases bolstering our ability to meet our mission and in some cases limiting our potential.

First, a few thoughts on the nature of the relationship between the pastor and the congregation. It is in fact a relationship more like a marriage than an employer to employee relationship. Although the pastor is the spiritual leader and, in effect, the chief operating officer of the organization, everyone has a say and a responsibility in the organization, especially in the UCC/Congregational tradition. The successes, the day to day functioning, and the problems that need addressing are shared. It also needs to be noted that when discussing Barry's ministry and leadership, we are also acknowledging Amy Welch's role and the importance of their shared partnership.

Barry is in his 6<sup>th</sup> year at the FCC. When he was called to serve as the FCCC pastor, he was presented with some challenges and goals the church wanted him to work on achieving. They included a youth program, adult education, an expanded FCCC presence in the community, and exploring becoming an ONA church. All of these things have been achieved and then some. This summer's vacation Bible camp provided a faith based day camp experience for 42 area children, involved 12 youth mentors and 9 adults, and all at no cost to the participants. The list of accomplishments and important experiences for the FCCC under Barry's leadership goes on:

*Visioning dinners that led to us becoming an ONA church and that also led to the church building becoming accessible for all; exceptional children's programming every Sunday; a wide range of adult education gatherings, including shared book experiences; an exceptional choir and music program; Barry and Amy attending every community school event; Barry on the front page of the Littleton Courier when he spoke at a recent charity event; more community dinners; organizing FCC's lead participation in the community caroling and outdoor gathering; creating a special service for children at Christmas; consistently 35 to 50 people attending Sunday service; and more.....*

One of the focus questions for this review process related to FCCC as a church of loving kindness in its relationships within the church and in its relationships within the broader community. Everyone was in agreement that our commitment to helping those in need is a priority and that we are making a difference in many lives. We showcase many of strengths through the food pantry, Thanksgiving baskets, and general financial help to those in need. We also value the support Barry and our church community have provided to many families at times of

crisis and loss. The church has hosted memorial services for individuals who were part of the church and those who were not. When a tragedy occurred in our community, the FCCC served as a support and resource for the whole community. These accomplishments are no minor feat given the limited FCCC infrastructure, volunteers, and congregation members.

However, in all relationships and organizations there are times when “things” are not how everyone wishes they were. There have been troubling examples within our congregation of interpersonal dynamics and behaviors that sometimes cross the boundaries of welcome, support, and loving kindness, and in some cases are outright inappropriate. Tempers, passions, and personal perspectives have led to “heat” and frayed relationships. We all must discern how to best work with these situations and how to make amends and come back together.

Our other focus question centered around day to day functioning, operation, and the flow of activities in the church. This was a consistent and across the board area of concern. Specific concerns came from individuals very much and often involved in a variety of roles and activities in the church. Noted were statements like: *We are not a well-oiled machine. Things feel very herky jerky. Why are things so hard, so often?* There were questions about whether roles and jobs are clearly defined, or not. Several said that it was hard to join in, participate, and be involved in helping due to what seemed to be a lack of planning and a lack of overall organization. It was pointed out that because of this, some individuals, often Barry and Amy, were over functioning and overworking at non-sustainable levels.

Another area of concern was regarding the overall “passion” and engagement among the members of the church. This is seen in the limited number of members willing to come forward and commit to helping with the children’s program and the youth group. Also, the level of financial commitment from the members to support the church is worrisome. While the overall financial health of the church is mostly stable, the congregation seems too willing to continue to rely on the generosity of previous members who created the trust fund that pays most of the bills.

There is no question about Barry’s level of passion for his Christian calling. Someone noted that his ability to preach and lead spiritually is “coming from his toes and out through every pore in his body.” His creativity, intellectualism, and natural compassion for people are present, always. Barry clearly states he loves his job, and the clear feeling from the congregation is that we “cannot imagine Barry and Amy not being here.”

One objective going into this process was to attempt to come up with knowledge and understanding that we could put to use. How can we as a church best apply what has been learned from this review process? How can we sustain and build on all that we have achieved together? What can we learn from this information that can prevent and head off problems and issues as we move forward? There are some things that are just the way they are and one cannot begin to accept them as they are until one stops thinking they need to be different. We are a small community. Often the same people serve multiple roles, making it challenging to find committed to volunteers to serve in the many church leadership and support roles. This church community includes a wide spectrum of spiritual beliefs. Our church community includes many diverse individuals.

Sometimes how things are is that they need to be different. The issues raised about our organizational functioning are a problem now and could become even more so if minimized or ignored. Again, these issues are all of our issues, and they did not happen overnight or out of the blue. Many were here six years ago. Because we are a small church, human resources need to be used wisely. They are limited. Priorities need to be established, understood and agreed to. Job descriptions for staff need to be looked at carefully and be in place to meet the need for effective organizational functioning.

If we don’t make the decisions and take the actions needed, much of what we are doing is not sustainable and we risk burnout, most notably for Barry and Amy, but also for other active members of our church

community. There is a term from mining that may apply here. The “**angle of repose**” (the steepest angle at which a sloping surface formed of a particular loose material is stable) demonstrates that if too much is piled on, stuff (in our case people) begins to slip off and fall away.

We are a small church that does big things and as Barry said, “There is no other church within the area that can offer the broadly liberal Christian option for adults and children that we do.” We have been and can be a collegial community that comes together to work for the church and all those it serves on one level or another. In Barry’s first sermon he referred to the “**fall line** in downhill skiing “ (a **fall line** is the **line** down a mountain or hill which is most directly **downhill**. That is, the direction a ball would roll if it were free to move on the slope under gravity). He was speaking to our willingness to be challenged, take chances, and lean in a bit to the pull of gravity, or **what** moves us.

May we keep leaning into the **fall line** while working with our **angle of repose**.

**July 23, 2015**

**Franconia Community Church of Christ - Pastor Parish Relations Committee**

**Annie Payette - Lucy Finn - David Weed - Beth Towle - Tom Allen**

## 2015 Deacon’s Report

2015 started off with a tragedy as Ronnie Berlack and his friend Bryce Astle were killed in an avalanche while skiing in Austria on January 5. Although Barry and Amy were away on vacation at the time, the church community pulled together to put on a wonderful service to support the Berlack family. Hundreds of people attended, more than at any event I have witnessed at our church. Next we hosted another memorial service on January 17, this one for Janet Williams, longtime friend of the church and member of the choir.

On Sunday, March 15 Robert Owen Williams shared his testimony with the church telling the story of how he became a Christian. On Sunday, December 13 he presented a follow up explaining how and why he serves at Franconia Community Church of Christ. We would be delighted to have others share their stories with us as well.

This fall the deacons were involved in several exciting projects at the church. Working together with Pastor Steve Gehlert we organized special services for Rally Day, The Blessing of the Animals, and World Communion Sunday. For Rally Day we welcomed back the choir, started the Sunday School year, and held an ice cream social. For the Blessing of the Animals we welcomed pets into the sanctuary and also offered blessings to pets who might not be comfortable in the sanctuary either with pictures or with blessings outside the church after the service. For World Communion Sunday we represented the diversity of communion services around the world by serving a variety of elements. Grape juice, cranberry juice, water, and balsamic vinegar were served to represent the blood of Christ. Pita, matzos, corn tortillas, and wheat bread were served to represent the body of our Lord.

We also held a couple of special events. Our annual Halloween Open House was special this year because in addition to welcoming the many trick-or-treaters and their families, we welcomed Barry and Amy back from their sabbatical. Having just returned from Iceland, they arrived dressed as Vikings. Many thanks to all the church members who helped to make this another successful event this year! We invited Mary Sturtevant to give a special program about her pilgrimage walking the Camino de Santiago, which she has now presented to our community twice. The deacons enjoyed this Advent season, especially our Christmas Eve services. We held the Greening of the Church on Saturday, December 5; several people came to help us decorate the church for the season. As usual we held two Christmas Eve services, one at 4 PM geared toward young families, and then at 7 PM the traditional services of lessons and carols featuring the choir. This was the last service that Victoria Cole led for us. We are pleased to welcome Joseph Hansalik as our new choir director.

We have updated the members and friends list and we see we had 34 active members in 2015. At present we note that a couple of members have moved away, but we hope some new members will join in the coming year. Loriann Jesseman, Susan Strong, and I are currently serving as deacons. We would be delighted if any of you would like to serve, please talk to any of us about ways you might be able to serve in helping to lead in the worship and life of our church.

Your fellow servant in Christ,  
Robert Owen Williams

## 2015 Music Director's Report



In January Music Director Victoria Cole began a new post as Music Director of South Congregational Church in Concord, New Hampshire. Victoria would like to express the following to the FCCC family:

*"Members of the FCCC choir have become a part of my family, and I will miss all of them tremendously. We have been patient with each other and we have forgiven each other when we haven't been patient. We have tackled new music, some of it quite difficult, and mostly triumphed, and learned something when we didn't triumph. We have welcomed new members and said goodbye to others. We have grown musically, and because we grew musically, we grew spiritually.*

*It seems hard to believe that I have been at FCCC for almost 8 years now. During the time we have had much growth in the choir and many highpoints, too many to enumerate here. And there are so many thanks to go out to the congregation, the Deacons, Pastor Barry Jacobson, Amy Welch, and all the choristers who have contributed so much of their volunteer time to music-making at our church."*

## 2015 Mission Board Report

The Mission Board had a very busy year, as the needs of our immediate and surrounding communities continue to grow due to the current economic climate, loss of area jobs, and other financial and health circumstances. We are fortunate to have the Bancroft Fund, private donations, and the incredible generosity of Our Lady of the Snows, all of which allow us to address as many requests for food, rent, heating, and other forms of assistance as we possibly can.

The Mission Board members this year included Susan Strong, Marsha Luce, Annie Payette, and Louise Gregoire-Allen, with me and Tracy Storella serving as co-chairs. Our job as a committee was to oversee the overall operation of the Good Neighbor Food Pantry, the Emergency Fuel Fund, and the Good Neighbor Assistance Fund (formerly called the "Mission Fund").

Our main fundraising effort was our annual Pancake Breakfast, which was once again a great success due to the hard work of many of our church members! We had it outside again this year, which seemed to be very popular! A big thank you to all our volunteers, especially Susan Strong, who did a great deal of the set-up work!

We were also blessed to be the "Partner of the Month" at the Littleton Food Coop for the month of November again this year. The Coop collected canned goods, and cash donations at the registers, and they allowed us to personally solicit donations from patrons on two different days. The Coop's hospitality enabled us to raise over \$850 for the Thanksgiving Baskets, for which we are most grateful!

The Good Neighbor Food Pantry continues to grow, as more families seek out help with their weekly groceries. We had as many as 50 families come to the Food Pantry during our busiest weeks, though weekly averages were lower. We continue to obtain food from multiple sources, including:

- 1) the NH Food Bank, where we use our funds to purchase food by the pound
- 2) the Emergency Food Program through Tri-County CAP, which is distributed at the food pantry at the Elevate Church on Redington Street in Littleton, and
- 3) donations from individuals, churches, schools, and various community groups. We are especially grateful for our partners in ministry at Our Lady of the Snows Roman Catholic church in Franconia, whose tremendously dedicated work at their annual yard sale raises a very large portion of the annual funding of the GNFP, enabling it to continue serving the community on a weekly basis. We especially want to thank Betsy Hansberger and Bev Frenkiewich, who put so much into the running of, and the funding of, the Food Pantry!

The Thanksgiving Basket Project was a great success again this year, under the leadership of Tracy Storella. Her planning and organizing of canned food stocks well in advance, plus the hard work of Mission Board members, volunteers, and school groups in the month of November, created a calm, happy and smooth work flow, which made it an enjoyable experience for all! For the first time, the Littleton food pantry at Redington Street produced

a number of their own baskets for Littleton residents, but our operation was ready with many additional baskets and turkeys when we were sent a large overflow of Littleton folks who were still in need. Not one family was turned away!

The Emergency Fuel Fund continues to be an important source of aid for the many families that cannot afford to heat their homes. We are thankful that the church agreed to donate the collection from both of the Christmas Eve services to the Fuel Fund, as the need far exceeds the resources available to us, even with the relatively warm weather and lower fuel prices. Private donations make up the rest of the fund, and we are still very much in need of donations at this time if you are able to help!

The Board decided this year to rename the "Mission Fund" as the "Good Neighbor Assistance Fund" in order to clear up any confusion about the nature of the fund and who receives the assistance. This fund is used to respond to the many requests from our neighbors for assistance with rent, electric and light bills, medications, and other needs. This fund was administered by a number of people during 2015, due to staffing changes, but most helpfully and expertly by Louise Gregoire-Allen from August until December of this year. Louise not only met with countless people seeking assistance, and consulted with numerous other agencies to try to get those needs met, but also systematized the process into a much more efficient and logical system which will significantly enhance the future administration of this fund. We are grateful for her enormous input of time and expertise! She and Nanette Avril and many other volunteers have devoted much time and care to our ministries on Tuesday!

We continued to extend our assistance to our partner in ministry, the Bancroft House, which received two donations towards their important work in our community. And we reached out to our more distant neighbors in Christ by sending donations to both Compas de Nicaragua and Honduras Hope.

And, finally, we finished up the year by organizing the Angel Tree Christmas gifts in December. A huge thank you to everyone who participated in this project, which certainly brought smiles to the faces of many children on Christmas morning!

~ Submitted by Amy Welch and Tracy Storella, Mission Board co-chairs

MISSION BOARD  
Good Neighbor Assistance Fund Activity  
July 21, 2015 - January 27, 2016  
Submitted by Louise Gregoire-Allen

91 Individuals from Littleton (45), Bethlehem (13), Lisbon (5), Franconia (6), Landaff (1), Bancroft House (4), Homeless (2), Unknown (8), our of "area" (7) made 133 requests for assistance.

Of these, 88 requests were "completed:"

- Rent	5,010.00
- Fuel	2,707.05
- Electricity	1,304.52
- Car repairs	606.44
- Gas	342.92
- Car payments	315.74
- Phone cards	360.00
- Medication	150.00
- U-Haul rental	128.27
- Pool pass	100.00
- Bus tickets	67.00
- Storage unit rental	55.00
- Clothes for work (at Walmart)	44.00
- Town trash bags	20.00
- Diapers	19.77
- Clothing vouchers from Encore	800.00

Totaling \$ 11,230.71, plus \$ 800 of clothing vouchers from Encore

And 45 requests were not "completed:"

- Pending-1
- Scam-1
- Out of catchment area-7
- Resolved positively in another way-7
- Could not contact with/did not call back after we reached out-10
- Declined assistance-2
- Referred to another agency-3
- Requests involving cars (payments, repairs, tires, etc.)-7
- Denied for variety of reasons-7

# 2015 Annual Meeting Minutes

Franconia Community Church of Christ Annual Meeting

8-Feb-15

- ❖ In attendance were: Tracy Storella, Amy Welch, Susan Strong, Robert Williams, Beth Towle, Victoria Cole, Harry Chadwick, Mary Sturtevant, Ken Ford, Dave Towle, Elizabeth Burpee, Tom Allen, Lucy Finn, David Weed, Linda Ford, Blair Colquhoun, Beth Lopes, Mary Lopes, Elizabeth Lopes, Loriann Jesseman, Barry Jacobson, Annie Payette.
- ❖ Dave Towle agreed to serve as secretary for the meeting.
- ❖ Tom Allen called us to order.
- ❖ Barry opened with a prayer.
- ❖ A quorum was established, acknowledged and agreed to.
- ❖ Annie motioned to accept the minutes from last year, seconded by Victoria and they were accepted unanimously.
- ❖ The Music Report was given by Victoria. She shared that she believes that building a fund for eventual organ replacement is important. She noticed that it is a line item in the budget. Some discussion ensued. Great accolades were given for the choir. Special thanks were expressed to Victoria for pulling together the special service for Ronnie Berlack. Also Victoria was called upon by many in attendance to join the church, and to continue to share good news from the pulpit as well as from her music!
- ❖ Deacon's report shared by Robert – He stated that the Deacons need to update the membership list. Robert nominated himself as Deacon for one more year.
- ❖ Pastor's report was mentioned by Barry – He shared that he is working on how to better deliver the welcoming message of love as a church, and he seeks our intentional partnership in that.
- ❖ Pastor/Parish relations report – Tom shared that they are very close to putting a bow on the work
- ❖ Building Committee – David shared how much work went into the projects for the past year and summarized the excellent results.
- ❖ Christian Education report – Amy invited us to peruse the happy news in the latest version of that report.
- ❖ Mission report – Susan said that the report reflects the work done by the committee.
- ❖ Committee Nominations and Approval:
  - Moderator – Tom accepted the role again.
  - Treasurer (3 year) – David will be continuing for his second year.
  - Assistant Treasurer – Needed and so far un-filled.
  - Board of Trustees – Robert will not renew. Ken was recognized for his contributions in his term, just ended. The church will now be open Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. Monday the office is working, but on other work – uninterrupted. The trustees should look closely at positions needed – clerical help was discussed.
  - Trustees get together Monthly on the last Wednesday of the month. Ken read the responsibilities of the Trustees.
  - Deacon's – Jane Walsh may be interested, but Amy needs to discuss the matter with her. Louise would like to be a Deacon on the Edge, but not official member.
  - Mission Board – Meets every other month. They are losing 2 this year and Louise has offered to join the board, Beth would consider helping out with this board, in addition to her role on PPRC.

- PPRC – It is not the same as other committees in how it is staffed.
- FCCC Denominational Delegate – Amy will remain on.
- Loriann motioned to approve, Annie seconded and all accepted.
- ❖ Other motions: Non-food pantry and having a blood drive closer to Franconia.
- ❖ Budget – David summarized the key points of the budget, including new provisions for a substitute pastor and church outreach. The overall income for the church improved, but largely as a result from Missions. There will a lesser dependence on the endowment interest. The building project is on budget and will remain below the \$ 370,000 level. Blair motioned and Amy seconded to accept the budget and it passed.
- ❖ Adaptive Sports held a meeting at the Church this year – an example of the benefit to the wider community of our improved accessibility
- ❖ Harry suggested a celebration for the new building. David agreed that there should be an official “Open House”.
- ❖ New Business: Beth suggested we look at doing something as a public fundraiser event on the Church property, such as having a "bouncy house" during Old Home Day. Tom added the suggestion of selling hot soup & hot cocoa at the Halloween Soccer Tournament.
- ❖ Barry led us in a closing prayer.
- ❖ Motion to conclude this year’s Annual Meeting by Annie seconded by Blair and accepted.

## Balance Sheet

### As of December 31, 2015

#### ASSETS

##### Current Assets

##### Checking/Savings

##### WGSB - Bank Accounts

Sunday School Savings	415.58	
Pastor's Discretionary Fund Debit Card	413.19	
CE Debit Cards	115.84	
General Checking	18,502.14	
Church Administrator's Debit Card	524.28	
Pastor's Debit Card	257.67	
WGSB - Bank Accounts--Other	452.00	
<u>Total WGSB - Bank Accounts</u>		20,680.70

##### MSB - Bank Accounts

Emergency Fuel Fund	1,157.15	
Good Neighbor Food Pantry	6,771.10	
Good Neighbor Assistance Fund	4,037.72	
<u>Total MSB - Bank Accounts</u>		11,965.97

##### Money Market Accounts

Dreyfus Liquid	24,949.65	
Schwab One (BPVI) Cash & MM	110,254.26	
<u>Total Money Market Accounts</u>		135,203.91

Total Checking/Savings	167,850.58
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Total Current Assets	167,850.58
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##### Fixed Assets

Accumulated Depreciation		-6,828.94
Apple Computer		1,892.85
Dell Computer		632
Building		788,876.17
Building Improvements		
New Bathrooms 2011	9,152.22	
Building Improvements- Other	35,976.84	
<u>Total Building Improvements</u>		45,129.06
Furniture & Fixtures		2,624.60
Land		109,600.00
Land Improvements		16,800.00
<u>Total Fixed Assets</u>		958,725.74

**Franconia Community Church of Christ**  
**Balance Sheet**  
**As of December 31, 2015**

Other Assets			
Investments			
Granite Investment			
Advisors	643,891.75		
St. Martin Land	<u>3,825.00</u>		
Total Investments		<u>647,716.75</u>	
Total Other Assets		<u>647,716.75</u>	
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>			<b><u>1,774,293.07</u></b>
<b>LIABILITIES &amp; EQUITY</b>			
Liabilities			
Long Term Liabilities			
WGSB Accessibility Project			
Loan		<u>338,376.82</u>	
Total Long Term Liabilities		<u>338,376.82</u>	
Total Liabilities		<u>338,376.82</u>	
Equity			
Net Assets Temp Restricted			
Freezer Fund - Food Pantry	465.00		
Accessibility Fund	15,527.53		
Sunday School Donations	50.00		
Church Dinner Donations	318.00		
New Bathroom Fund	2,521.48		
Youth Ministries	1,263.31		
Carol Bennink Music Fund	11,750.00		
CE Scholarship Fund	298.81		
Church Garden Fund	<u>115.00</u>		
Total Net Assets Temp Restricted		32,309.13	
Net Assets Unrestricted		1,180,509.32	
Net Fund Balance/Loss		-227,391.75	
Opening Bal Equity		548,534.86	
Net Income		<u>-98,045.31</u>	
Total Equity		<u>1,435,916.25</u>	
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES &amp; EQUITY</b>			<b><u>1,774,293.07</u></b>

## 2015 FCCC Profit & Loss Budget vs. Actual Report

	Jan-Dec 2015	2015	2015	2016	
	Actuals	Budget	\$over/under Budget	Proposed Budget	Notes
<b>Ordinary Income/Expense</b>					
<b>Income</b>					
<b>Dividends and Interest</b>					
<b>American Baptist</b>	1,475	2,850	-1,375	1,475	
<b>Dreyfus Liquid</b>	0	0	0	0	
<b>Bank of America</b>					
<b>Bancroft Trust Fund</b>	21,599	20,000	1,599	21,600	Mission Board (GNAF)
<b>Total Bank of America</b>	21,599	20,000	1,599	21,600	
<b>Grimes Fund</b>	2,002	1,500	502	2,000	
<b>Total Dividends and Interest</b>	25,076	24,350	726	25,075	
<b>Donations</b>					
<b>Donations - Other</b>			0	0	
<b>Mission Board Account Donations</b>	5,937		5,937	3,500	
<b>Emergency Fuel</b>	4,502		4,502	4,500	
<b>Food Pantry</b>	12,469	23,150	-10,681	13,000	
<b>Pancake Breakfast</b>				1,500	
<b>Thanksgiving Baskets</b>	3,682		3,682	4,000	
<b>Total Donations</b>	26,590	23,150	3,440	26,500	Mission Board Accounts
<b>Misc. Income</b>					
<b>For Vacation Bible School</b>	200		200	200	
<b>Misc. Income - Other</b>	229		229	0	
<b>Total Misc. Income</b>	429	0	429	200	
<b>Offerings</b>					
<b>Offerings - Directed</b>	335	32,000	-31,665	30,000	Accessibility Project Fund
<b>Offerings - General</b>	13,147	20,000	-6,853	13,000	Level Funded
<b>Total Offerings</b>	13,482	52,000	-38,518	43,000	
<b>Rent Income</b>	0	75	-75	0	
<b>St. Martin Land</b>	338		338	325	
<b>Undes. Mission</b>	0	5,150	-5,150	0	
<b>Total Income</b>	65,915	104,725	-38,810	95,100	
<b>Gross Profit</b>	65,915	104,725	-38,810	95,100	

	Jan-Dec 2015	2015	2015	2016	
	Actuals	Budget	\$over/under Budget	Proposed Budget	Notes
<b>Expense</b>					
<b>Accessibility Loan</b>					
Principal Payments of Access	0	11,740	-11,740	19,575	
Interest/Access Project	12,714	11,752	962	12,714	
<b>Total Accessibility Loan</b>	12,714	23,492	-10,778	32,289	
<b>Pastor Travel - Substitute</b>	377	1,000	-623	0	
<b>Pastor - Substitute</b>	12,000	5,000	7,000	0	
<b>Community Evangelism/Outreach</b>	2,333	2,750	-417	2,750	
<b>Equipment</b>	5,196	2,000	3,196	5,000	
<b>Organ Project</b>	0	2,000	-2,000	0	
<b>Franconia Children's Center Sch</b>	0	0	0	0	
<b>Advertising</b>	365	500	-135	500	
<b>Background Checks</b>	0	200	-200	200	
<b>Bank Charges</b>	623	800	-177	650	
<b>Bookkeeping Service</b>	4,086	4,300	-214	4,100	
<b>Building Maintenance</b>	4,809	2,500	2,309	4,500	
<b>Casual Labor</b>	230	300	-70	230	
<b>Church Beautification (book shelves)</b>	0	0	0	0	
<b>UCC Wider Mission</b>	3,500	3,500	0	3,500	
<b>Christian Education</b>					
Adult Education	1,178	2,000	-822	1,500	
Christian Ed. Supplies	1,851	2,000	-149	1,700	Lowered-use supplies
Cont. Education	133	500	-367	250	
CE Education	0	200	-200	200	
Payroll - Child Care	1,240	1,200	40	1,250	
Payroll - Christian Education	2,416	5,000	-2,584	2,500	
<b>Vacation Bible School</b>					
VBS Youth Wages	2,145	2,000	145	2,500	
Vacation Bible School - Other	2,499	2,500	-1	2,500	
<b>Total Vacation Bible School</b>	4,644	4,500	144	5,000	
<b>Youth Group</b>	3,655	5,500	-1,845	3,700	
<b>Total Christian Education</b>	15,117	20,900	-5,783	16,100	
<b>Conference-delegates</b>	161	400	-239	400	
<b>Custodian</b>					
Cleaning	4,628	4,000	628	4,600	Martin's Cleaning
Kitchen and Cleaning Supplies	1,396	1,500	-104	1,500	
Payroll - Sexton	1,638	2,500	-862	1,650	Level Funded
<b>Total Custodian</b>	7,662	8,000	-338	7,750	
<b>Deacons</b>					
Coffee Hour	800	7,000	-6,200	1,000	
Flowers	-95	100	-195	100	
Other Expenses	0	500	-500	0	
Pulpit Supply	408	450	-42	450	
Special Events	258	500	-242	500	
Worship Supplies	402	1,250	-848	1,250	
<b>Total Deacons</b>	1,773	9,800	-8,027	3,300	

	Jan-Dec 2015	2015	2015	2016	
	Actuals	Budget	\$over/under Budget	Proposed Budget	Notes
<b>Dues</b>	966	0	966	1,000	
<b>Equipment Maintenance</b>	3,198	2,500	698	2,500	
<b>Grounds Maintenance</b>	3,253	3,000	253	3,200	Mac Enterprises
<b>Snowplowing, sand, salt</b>	0	2,000	-2,000	2,000	Mac Enterprises
<b>Insurance</b>					
<b>Liability</b>	5,907	4,000	1,907	5,000	Dropped Builders Risk
<b>Workmans Comp</b>	1,522	1,000	522	1,600	
<b>Total Insurance</b>	7,429	5,000	2,429	6,600	
<b>Mission</b>					
<b>Emergency Fuel Disbursements</b>	4,069	6,000	-1,931	4,500	
<b>Bancroft House</b>	2,000	4,000	-2,000	4,000	
<b>Direct Aid</b>	24,105	15,000	9,105	19,600	
<b>Food Pantry</b>					
<b>Food Pantry Payroll</b>	1,889	1,500	389	500	Not funded thru GNFP
<b>Food Pantry Purchases</b>	19,208	14,000	5,208	12,500	
<b>Food Pantry - Other</b>	1,245		1,245	1,000	
<b>Total Food Pantry</b>	22,342	15,500	6,842	14,000	
<b>International Aid</b>	3,020	3,000	20	3,000	
<b>Other</b>	24	150	-126	50	Supplies
<b>Thanksgiving Baskets</b>	1,130	4,500	-3,370	3,500	
<b>Total Mission</b>	56,690	48,150	8,540	48,650	
<b>Music</b>					
<b>Payroll - Music Services</b>	8,320	8,320	0	8,320	
<b>Music Services Substitutes</b>	825	600	225	600	
<b>Music Supplies</b>	848	700	148	700	
<b>Special Music</b>	920	1,350	-430	1,350	
<b>Total Music</b>	10,913	10,970	-57	10,970	
<b>Office Supplies</b>	3,339	2,500	839	2,200	Lowered
<b>Pastor's Discretionary Fund</b>	2,000	2,000	0	2,000	
<b>Pastor Expense (BJ)</b>					
<b>Compensation</b>	13,973	14,500	-527	14,500	
<b>Health Insurance</b>	10,203	12,000	-1,797	10,000	
<b>Housing</b>	35,510	36,000	-490	36,000	
<b>Travel</b>	2,101	2,500	-399	2,500	
<b>Workshops</b>	140	400	-260	400	
<b>Education Fund</b>	1,056	1,000	56	1,000	
<b>Life Insurance</b>	984	750	234	750	
<b>Pension Fund</b>	4,666	3,600	1,066	5,000	
<b>Total Pastor Expense (BJ)</b>	68,633	70,750	-2,117	70,150	
<b>Payroll - Administration</b>	10,075	10,200	-125	13,000	
<b>Payroll Expenses</b>	23		23	0	
<b>Payroll Taxes</b>	3,962	3,200	762	4,500	
<b>Petty Cash</b>	100		100	100	
<b>Postage</b>	291	500	-209	350	
<b>Professional Fees</b>	25		25	25	

	Jan-Dec 2015	2015	2015	2016	
	Actuals	Budget	\$over/under Budget	Proposed Budget	Notes
<b>Utilities</b>					
Electricity	3,531	3,000	531	4,000	
Fuel	0	0	0	0	
Propane	5,632	6,000	-368	6,000	
Telecommunications - Internet	840	1,100	-260	1,000	
Telephone	1,666	700	966	1,500	
Water	475	400	75	500	
<b>Total Utilities</b>	<b>12,144</b>	<b>11,200</b>	<b>944</b>	<b>13,000</b>	
<b>Total Expense</b>	<b>253,987</b>	<b>259,412</b>	<b>-5,425</b>	<b>261,514</b>	
<b>Net Ordinary Income</b>	<b>-188,072</b>	<b>-154,687</b>	<b>-33,385</b>	<b>-166,414</b>	
<b>Other Income/Expense</b>					
<b>Other Income</b>					
Interest - Savings Acct.	0		0	0	
Interest - Checking Account	8		8	0	
<b>Gain/Loss on Investments</b>					
Granite State Inv.(former BPVI)	90,016	154,687	-64,671	148,436	
St. Martin Land	0	0		0	
<b>Total Gain/Loss on Investments</b>	<b>90,016</b>	<b>154,687</b>	<b>-64,671</b>	<b>148,436</b>	
<b>Total Other Income</b>	<b>90,024</b>	<b>154,687</b>	<b>-64,663</b>	<b>148,436</b>	
<b>Net Other Income</b>	<b>90,024</b>	<b>154,687</b>	<b>-64,663</b>	<b>148,436</b>	
<b>Net Income</b>	<b>-98,048</b>	<b>0</b>		<b>-17,978</b>	

## 2016 Nominations Page

### Officers and Committees

**\*\* = To Be Elected at 2016 Annual Meeting**

<b>Position</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Expires</b>
Moderator (1 year term)	** (Vacant)	2016
Treasurer (3 year term)	David Weed	2017
Assistant Treasurer (3 year term)	** Loriann Jesseman	2016
Board of Trustees (3 year term) 4 - 6 members	Annie Payette	2017
	Jeffery Jesseman	2017
	** (Vacant)	2016
	** Tracy Storella	2016
	David Weed (ex-officio member with voting rights)	2017
	Barry Jacobson (ex-officio member without voting rights)	
	Loriann Jesseman (ex-officio member without voting rights)	
Board of Deacons (3 year term) 4 - 8 members	Loriann Jesseman	2017
	Robert Owen Williams	2018
	Susan Strong	2018
	Barry Jacobson (full member with voting rights)	
Mission Board (3 year term) 4 - 8 members	Susan Strong	2018
	Annie Payette	2018
	Amy Welch	2018
	** Tracy Storella	2016
	** Marsha Luce	2016
	** Louise Gregoire-Allen	2016
	Barry Jacobson (ex-officio member without voting rights)	
Pastor - Parish Relations Committee (appointed)	Tom Allen	
	Lucy Finn	
	Annie Payette	
	Beth Towle	
	David Weed	
FCCC Lay Delegates (to UCC North Country Assoc. NH Conference & national Synod)	** Amy Welch	
	** (Vacant)	

## Words and Images from the Congregation

Sabbatical: A Time of Reflection

-Robert Owen Williams

As you all know, Barry and Amy finished their time of sabbatical with three months apart from our church community. During this time we at the church also had a time of sabbatical as we spent our time apart from Barry and Amy. We were pleased to be shepherded by pastor Stephen Gehlert.

The idea of a sabbatical year comes from Leviticus 25:1-7, where the Israelites were commanded to give the land a year of rest once every seven years. This idea itself stems from the idea of keeping the Sabbath; since God rested on the seventh day after creating the world (Genesis 2:2-3) the Israelites were commanded to take one day off after every six days of work (Exodus 20:8). Although we did not follow the literal seven year plan for our Sabbatical, we still honor the idea of a time of rest and reflection.

No major events challenged us in this time of Sabbatical, there were no deaths, births, weddings or baptisms in our church community at the time. Yet we know that our community can rise to the challenge as so many called to mind the service we put together for Ronnie Berlack this past January when Barry and Amy happened to be on vacation. Many people have thanked us for putting on this event and continue to be grateful.

We look back at a time when things have been going well. We continued to have about thirty people in attendance at Sunday worship throughout the time of sabbatical. But church is about more than numbers, whether we are in a sabbatical or not. We rejoice for all that were present with us. And we look at the things we have learned together.

Barry and Steve both love the Lord, Jesus Christ, and both work hard to share His message with us. Our Sunday worship services, adult ed classes, youth group, and Sunday school all were shepherded by pastor Steve during his time with us. One Sunday I got to share with the Sunday School children and I talked to them about how we can see God by looking closely at God's creation. We spent time exploring the church property and looking to see how God was revealed in the natural things around us. For the Adult Ed classes Steve led us in reading about and discussing: How to be a Welcoming Christian, Grateful Hearts, Generous Spirits, and the Sabbath. In Steve's sermons he often preached from scripture, showing us how we need to be prepared with the armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-18), we are to be salt for the Earth (Matthew 5:13), and we must have faith like the Syrophenician woman (Mark 7:24-30). He also preached about finding our way, drawing from his experience in hiking Mt. Garfield and starting down the wrong trail twice before finally hiking down the correct path.

I asked people in our congregation to share their reflections on the time of sabbatical. Several people expressed their preference for one preaching style or the other. Others mentioned trivial things which have more to do with having a competent secretary in the office, than who was pastoring us at the time. Thank you, Cindy, for the administrative work you are doing for our church!

We hope that we can continue to build on our strengths and learn from one and other. We hope that we are all refreshed from our time of rest and will be able to do more to serve as we are called. As we give thanks at this holiday season and help the unfortunate among us, we strive to follow the greatest commands Jesus presented to us: love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, and strength; and love your neighbor as yourself.

## Reflection from Paris

*Below is a message from Isabelle Eyman, who is living in Paris this year. Her schedule on Friday, November 13 happened to include a walk through the neighborhood of the Bataclan theater on Boulevard Voltaire, a few hours before 89 people were killed and 200 people were wounded in that building during the terrorist attacks. Here is what she wrote the next day.*

Reflecting upon last night's events, I wasn't sure how to navigate the aftermath, uncertain whether or not it was appropriate to feel something beyond only sympathy. Though I've accepted and embraced Paris as my home for the year, I've been hesitant to acknowledge myself among those directly affected, feeling selfish in saying that I can understand their suffering, the torment, the loss of safety they once held. I'm an outsider, unable to ever meld with this country's identity.

Before getting to work this afternoon, I was sitting down with my boss, reflecting upon all that's happened. With genuine concern, she looked at me, asking me what we do next. Immediately I felt helpless, seeing my own inability to generate any amount of change, to create any discernible good. It's discouraging, trying to confront your own inadequacy. Feeling insufficient in facing a hatred that seems insurmountable, too great to overcome.

But then I realized that the solution begins with a simple practice: love. Love is sustainable, feasible, and gratifying. We combat the violence that seems so commonplace, that seems to penetrate our everyday, by acknowledging the presence and importance of everyone around us. Despite background, despite distance, despite differing views, we love. Love breaks down all feelings of exclusion, all feelings of isolation I previously had.

I don't want to seem naive in believing that this sentiment can resolve and transform, but it seems like the only possibility amidst so much outward aggression. So we promote happiness, we practice joy in everything we do. See yourself in relation to others, understand your affect, your influence, the profundity your kindness holds.

Apply it everywhere and everyday. Love everyone.

All my best,  
Isabelle

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**Normal Font** = Active Member in 2015

*Normal Font* = Inactive Member

*Italics Font* = Friend

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