

A HEALTHY NEW YEAR!

With the ringing in of the New Year come resolutions to be happier and healthier than in the Old. Gym memberships are purchased, diets are planned, and maybe even a few pounds are shed. Often, these resolutions last but a few weeks. They were made with the desire to be healthier and perhaps even a certain amount of will to do so, but there's a piece missing and so even the best resolutions tend to flounder away. Often in our quest for health and happiness, we know exactly *what* to do or *what* should be done; we just haven't a clue *how* to go about making it happen. In other words, we know *what* the end goal looks like; we just don't know *how* to get there.

In this way, congregations are just like people. There is a desire to be a healthy church; the congregation may even have some idea of what a healthy church looks like (or at least, what it does *not* look like); but getting there and making it happen are another story. I believe that this community wants and needs a healthy church; I know there has been a lot of hurt and unnecessary conflict in the past and I think this congregation is ready to BE different. I think this congregation wants to change; wants to *transform* into a better and healthier version of itself; if only... if only it could figure out *how* to do so in a truly loving and lasting way.

This is the nature of our work together during this special, developmental time of ministry. We are working together on *how* to become healthier in a realistic and loving and lasting way. That means we will be talking about and focusing on process – a lot. Much of the congregation's history of unnecessary and harmful conflict stems from problems with process and so this is what we need to pay attention to, now – transforming congregational processes into good, healthy, transparent, and flexible processes. For those of you who attended the recent brainstorming session on Radical Hospitality, you saw this attention to good process in action. Whether you were able to attend or not, I hope you will check out the special section of this newsletter which reports the results of the creative thinking which happened that day.

To a Happy and Healthy New Year!

In faith,

Rev. Michelle



CHURCH CALENDAR

Sunday, Jan. 1, 2012

10:00 a.m. ~ New Year's Pot Luck Brunch Rev. Michelle LaGrave

Monday, Jan. 2, 2012

2:00 p.m. Parish Committee Meeting

Sunday, Dec. 8, 2012

10:00 a.m. ~ "It's A New Year!"
Rev. Michelle LaGrave

Wednesday, Jan. 11, 2012

2:00 p.m. ~ "Soul Collage"
Rev. Michelle LaGrave

Saturday, Jan. 14, 2012

**4:00 p.m. ~ Seuss in the Sanctuary:
Open Mike and Potluck**
Rev. Michelle LaGrave

Sunday, Jan. 15, 2012

10:00 a.m. ~ "A Life of the Spirit"
Rev. Michelle LaGrave

11:15 a.m. ~ Annual Parish Meeting

Thursday, Jan. 19, 2012

6:00 p.m. Parish Committee Meeting

Sunday, Jan. 22, 2012

10:00 a.m. ~ "Peace and Social Action" Lay-led

Sunday, Jan. 29, 2012

10:00 a.m. ~ A Love Too Big to Die
Rev. Michelle LaGrave

Sundays, 9:00 - 9:45 a.m.

Silent meditation in the Ladies Parlor

New Year's Potluck Brunch -

Following a brief and worshipful opening with Rev. Michelle, we'll join together for a festive brunch. It's potluck, so remember to bring your favorite dish! (And a list of ingredients for those with dietary restrictions or allergies)

"It's a New Year" - A funny but oh-so-serious look at the New Year with readings by Robert Fulghum.

Rev. Michelle LaGrave

"A Life of the Spirit" - The civil rights work of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is well-known; probably lesser so is his inner spiritual life- that same life which sustained him in his civil rights work and allowed him to continue even while his life was threatened. Through worship, song, prayer, and readings we'll explore the life of the spirit which allows any of us to do the work of social justice.
Rev. Michelle LaGrave

"A Love Too Big to Die" - From Thomas Potter to Rob Bell, the story of Universalism comes full circle in a Love that is simply just too big to die. Rev. Michelle LaGrave

Events and Other Happenings:

Soul Collage - Take a break from the hustle and bustle of the holiday season just past and spend a bit of time nurturing your spirit. Join Rev. Michelle for an evening of inspirational creativity.

We'll make collages, spend some time in reflection, and may even create a group poem. Absolutely NO artistic talent or experience is required! Wednesday, January 11th at 2 .pm.

Seuss in the Sanctuary: Open Mike and Potluck - As radically hospitable people, we want to be sure that everyone who joins us for worship on Sunday mornings can hear! As we know

that hearing loss is all about the hearer's ability to hear and not the speaker's ability to project, we are committed to using microphones during worship. Of course, not everyone is comfortable speaking into a microphone, so we're here to help in a fun and engaging way. Join us for an evening of reading Seuss in the sanctuary and then socializing over dinner. Saturday, January 14, 4 p.m.

Sponsored by the Membership Committee

Multigenerational Ministry Team – Do you love talking and worshipping with people of all ages? Does getting to know people across the generations feed your spirit? Would you love to develop a relationship with someone who is either much younger or older than you are? If so, please join us as we gather together to work on the congregation's goal of providing "multigenerational experiences through worship, programs, and activities..." We won't use a typical committee structure, but rather will work together to function as a ministry team. People of all ages, abilities, talents, and interests are welcome and needed. Tasks may range from the practical to the ideological, all depending on what YOU bring to the table! If you are interested in contributing to this ministry, please contact Rev. Michelle with the days and times you are likely to be available. We'd like to find some meeting times that work for everyone who is interested in this important piece

Notes from the Parish Committee

January is the time for two important church events. It is the month when we move over to the **Davis Memorial for all Sunday Services**, until Easter on April 8th, and it is also the month for our **Annual Meeting**. This meeting is scheduled for Jan. 15th at 11:15 a.m., and it is crucial that we have enough members present to hear committee reports and vote on all the articles, including our budget for the next year. Thank you so much to our Nominating Committee (Anne Perkins, Chip Bull, and Ellen Woodbury) for their efforts to fill vacancies in the slate of officers and the various church committees.

January is also the time for our very special **New Year's Day Brunch**, organized by the Minister and the Parish Committee. We hope you will join us on Sunday, January 1, 2012 at 10:00 a.m. for an informal worship service, and then a pot-luck brunch. Bring any dish you would like to share with your church family and friends!

Pam Chevalier,
Parish Committee Secretary

A Tribute to Denise Nicoletti

Adrian Walker, a columnist for the Boston Globe recently wrote an article recognizing the extraordinary work of Denise Nicoletti of Petersham. In 1997, along with colleague Chrysante Demetry, Denise developed a program called Camp Ranch, to encourage middle school girls to pursue careers in engineering. The heart of this program is a two-week residential session at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, where interested

students, chosen by lottery, are given the opportunity to attend high-level classes, and are encouraged to pursue careers in science and engineering. Chrysante described her friend, Denise, as "spunky and creative; she played the bass guitar and sewed her own clothes. She had a passion for engineering, and she did important, relevant work." In December, President Barack Obama invited Denise's daughter, Celeste, to come to the White House to take part in a ceremony honoring programs that have helped to mentor future scientists, with an emphasis on programs directed to groups who have been underrepresented in those fields. Camp Reach was selected as one of the programs to receive the *Presidential Award for Excellence in Science, Mathematics and Engineering Mentoring*.

Denise Nicoletti died in 2002, leaving a husband and three small children. Celeste, now a junior at Worcester Academy, accepted the award from the President and Mrs. Obama, in her mother's name. Celeste said of her mother, "I think she'd be really proud that all her work went to something this big and this great. I know she didn't do this for the award, but to help people." Denise was a loved member of our congregation, who contributed so much to our church and to the town. She touched our lives, and we all can feel privileged to have known this very special woman.

The Congregation's Developmental Goals:

- To increase attendance and membership with a diversity of ages
- To foster a spirit of reconciliation among all members and friends of the congregation
- To provide multigenerational experiences through worship, programs, and activities, sharing our liberal religious traditions and values

Aging with Spirit

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

I will be offering "Aging with Spirit" twice early in the new year: As we age, everything shifts and changes. We will look at how aging affects our spiritual lives. What are the gifts and challenges? What becomes more and less important to us? What images of old age do we carry? What does it mean to seek and find wholeness in this time?

**Tuesday, February 7,
9:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m.** (coffee at 9:00),
at Rolling Ridge Retreat Center, North
Andover, Mass.
\$53 early registration,
\$60 after January 31,
Includes lunch
www.rollingridge.org

Rev. Karen Foley

Brainstorming Session on Radical Hospitality

The Membership Committee hosted a brainstorming session during social hour on Sunday December 18th. The session was a follow up to the December 4th service on radical hospitality and the purpose was to come up with ideas for implementing radical hospitality into our church.

We had great participation and everyone's ideas were recorded on paper. At the end of the session everyone was given 5 dots that they could place beside the ideas they liked best. The results of the dot vote are:

1. Lecture series – 10 votes
2. Provide rides to church and other events – 6 votes
3. Coffee House – 5 votes
4. Install handrails on front steps – 5 votes
5. Provide activities for children – non church – 4 votes
6. Provide list of ingredients for food items at potlucks – 4 votes
7. Music events – 3 votes
8. Get the word out – everyone is welcome – 3 votes
9. Provide family events – 3 votes
10. Book Club on Spiritual Practice – 3 votes
11. Have events that meet on a regular basis – 3 votes
12. Multigenerational talent show – 2 votes
13. Hearing loss ministry – 1 vote
14. Ice cream social – 1 vote
15. Provide helpers for seniors – 1 vote



YOGA WITH LINDA January 2012

Tuesdays and Thursdays at 10 a.m.:
Jan. 3, 5, 10, 12, 17, 19, and 31
NO classes on Jan. 24 and 26

Chair Yoga: Jan. 4, 11, and 18.
NO Class Jan. 25
\$5 per class

For more information, contact Linda at:
lckabo@verizon.net
978-434-1598

Newsletter

Material for the newsletter may be emailed to the firstparishnt@verizon.net, or can be placed in the wall file outside the Church office. Please make a note stating that the item is for the newsletter, or you can mail your item to: First Congregational Parish, News Team, PO Box 305, Petersham, MA 01366.

Friendly Reminder: Please send in your newsletter items ***on or before*** the ***Monthly Deadline Date, which can be found on the front page of the newsletter.***

Our church newsletter is edited and mailed by volunteers. We are always happy and grateful to receive contributions towards the expenses of paper, printing and mailing, as well as general news and news of families.

Thank You,
The Newsletter Team,
Kay Berry
Don Eaton
Robert Hall
Kathy Ballou ~ Editor