

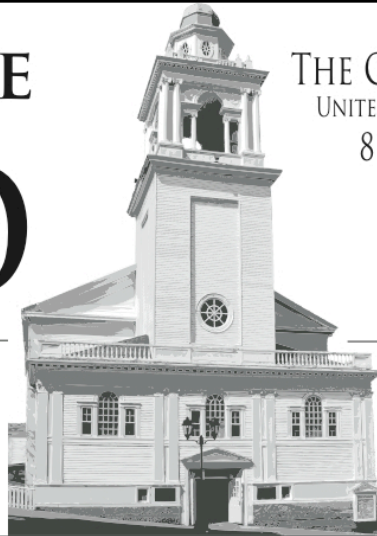
THE PILGRIMAGE HERALD

THE CHURCH OF THE PILGRIMAGE
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST – CONGREGATIONAL
8 TOWN SQUARE, PLYMOUTH,
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Office Hours: Mon-Fri 8:30am-4:00pm

December 26, 2010

Dear Friends:

This is the last pastor's letter to appear in The Pilgrimage Herald for the year 2010. Indeed, this is the last of these letters that I will write in this space as the pastor of our church. I don't know just when it was that I began writing them, but I began the practice. It was a long time ago!

It hasn't always been an easy undertaking to come up with a theme for these weekly letters. I've conjured some ideas for a long time about what this letter would contain, but when it has come time to compose it I've had great difficulty in doing so. It has been somewhat of a chore each week to write these letters, but in this one I have the sad feeling that I won't any longer have that chore to perform. In other words, I have been at this routine long enough that I've come to enjoy it and shall sorely miss it.

We have been through much together as a congregation. As I face my final few days as your pastor the memories flood in over me with tidal wave force. I deem us to have been in a love relationship. Love always endures, but love passes through crying times as well as laughing times. As the apostle so eloquently put it: "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." (I Corinthians 13:7).

Yes, we've endured much together, but when all things are shaken down and sifted out we have somehow allowed love to be our ruling influence, sometimes in spite of ourselves! As I depart as your "settled" pastor I do so with enormous pain, but with great love in my heart for all of you.

The comfort I have is also found in the wisdom of the apostle: "Love never ends..." (I Corinthians 13:8). I will not be your pastor come January 1, 2011, that will cease, but I will always love you. No pastoral code demands that love should end, only official duties end. It would be unbiblical to forbid love and humanly and emotionally unacceptable to me; it would be impossible!

I will, by the grace of God and your generosity of heart, be Pastor Emeritus of The Church of the Pilgrimage. I am not sure I am worthy of that designation, but in the humility of our first pastor, the Rev. John Robinson, I accept it with extreme gratitude.

I have been overwhelmed in recent weeks by your expressions of love for me and my family. I thank you for every kind note and word. It gives me hope and affirms the goodness of God we have shared together.

You are in a good place spiritually as a congregation as I depart as your pastor. You will grow by the work of an interim minister and as you call a new pastor. I am happy to proclaim the message of the old hymn, "All is well." For me, though, for now, for us, I make appeal to the apostle; "So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love." The greatest of these I reserve for you, now and forever.

Love,

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The Church of the Pilgrimage, UCC is an Open and Affirming Church

Moderator – Allen Hoyt; Treasurer – Verna-Ross Hoyt; Clerk – Lois Post; Collector – Tom Mudgett;
Music Director – Kelley DePasqua; Organist – Michael Eaton; Office Manager – Shellie Souza;
World Mission Emphasis – Heifer Project International; Church Building Telephone – 508-747-1341

On Our Calendar

Dec 26: Morning Worship at 10am, Rev. Gary L. Marks, preaching. This will be Gary's last Sunday service as the pastor of The Church of the Pilgrimage (see notes).

Dec 27: The Church Office will be closed.. Monday Meals of Hospitality in Allerton Hall, 11am.

Dec 28: Gary will be in the church office at 9:30am.

Dec 29: Gary will be in the church office at 9:30am.

Dec 30: This will be Gary's last day in the church office. He will be there at 9:30am.

Dec 31-New Years Eve: The Church Office will be closed.

COMING EVENTS-

Jan 5: Missions Committee meeting at 7pm in the Marks Conference Room.

Jan 6: Christian Education Committee meeting at 7pm in the Marks Conference Room.

Jan 13: The Membership and Evangelism Committee will meet at 7pm in the Marks Conference Room.

Flowers

In loving memory of Grant (Rusty) Axford. Given by his parents, Barbara and Grant Axford.

Notes

Rev. Peter Gomes is at Mass General Hospital.

Recuperating at The Spaulding Rehabilitation Center in Sandwich, Mass., **Nancy Scheid**.

The service on December 26, 2010 will be one in which a denominational office will be present to recognize Gary's long ministry as pastor of The Church of the Pilgrimage and includes an ending of the covenant relationship between the pastor and the congregation. The service will also be one in which Gary will have conferred upon him the title of Pastor Emeritus. That is an honorary title one which is cherished by any pastor who has it conferred upon him or her. It is a touching finish for Gary. Gary and Kathy hope to see and greet you at this special service. Gary's official capacity ends on January 1, 2011, but his love for you know no ending.

We thank the Coombs family for leading the Advent Candle Service on December 19.

We thank the Confirmation Class for leading the Advent Candle Service on Christmas Eve.

Please keep in touch with **Gary and Kathy via email** scrooby1606@verizon.net.

There will not be an issue of **The Pilgrimage Herald** for the week beginning on January 2, 2011.

Again, we thank all who provided **memorial or honorary poinsettias** for our service on the Fourth Sunday of Advent/Christmas Sunday. It is always so lovely to see the sanctuary adorned with those splendid plants and to remember loved ones in the context of celebrating Christ's birth among us. Those who loaned poinsettias to the church may collect them at the conclusion of our Christmas Eve services or on December 26th.

A Note from Gary: December 21 is not only the date of the winter solstice, it is also Forefather's day. The latter is the date of the Pilgrim's landing at Plymouth Rock, or at least the day upon which Plymouth was to be the site selected for a permanent dwelling. The story of Pilgrim beginnings is fascinating, one filled with drama, suffering, determination, survival and hope. The guiding light of the Pilgrim was their church covenant. The primary reason for their remarkable undertaking was to establish a church based upon covenantal freedoms. To achieve that end they sacrificed their securities, their belongings, severed ties with their country, their church in Holland and, in some cases, even with their own families. Their pilgrimage was fraught with peril. Their first winter was one of pain, want, and loss, losses which include the death of half their number. Think on these things and put into mind the covenant which is still the constitutional foundation of The Church of the Pilgrimage. Our sacrifices, thank God, are likely not as severe, surely different in kind, but we should be willing to make them as they befit us for the sake of the covenant. Forefather's (also Foremother's) Day is celebrated, for the most part, only in Plymouth. I will always remember the covenant on that day and give thanks to God for the church I love who remembers to live by it.

Another note from Gary: I want to thank our office manager, Shellie Souza, for her years of able and dedicated service to the church, but also for her service to me. Every week she deciphers from my handwritten notes what will be in the Herald. She types some of my sermons, screens calls, charmingly greets everyone who comes into the office. She is a friend to the church, she is my friend. She is a treasure. Treat her well!

Flowers are needed for the Sunday services in January. This is a great way to honor or memorialize loved ones and at the same time contribute to our worship experience. Please call Joyce at 508-746-1077 if you are interested. Thank you.

Thank you to those who joined us in caroling at The Newfield House on the afternoon of December 12. We had a wonderful time singing together and visiting with the residents including Janie Chapman and the Belcher sisters. We were small in number, but mighty in voice. If you were unable to join us this year, perhaps you will consider making it part of your advent season next year. Thank you! Marna Blomberg and Barbara Northop

Invitation-Women's Guild

The Pilgrimage Women's Guild invites the women of the church to attend the January 14 meeting of the Guild at 1:00pm pm in Allerton Hall. January's speaker will be Karen Goldstein who will present a program recalling the Summer Street Redevelopment that took place in the 1960's. It should be of particular interest to those who remember the Summer Street of years past. Tea and refreshments will follow the program and business meeting. We hope to see you there. Vice. President, Diana Budge

Monday Meals: Many thanks to Mike Morway, Catering Manager at T-Bones Restaurant on Main St, who has generously offered to provide us with a complete Turkey dinner—with all the trimmings—for our guests on Christmas Day. We will again offer Christmas dinner to our neighbors in need, or anyone who would just like a pleasant place to be on Christmas. Mike's delicious dinner was much appreciated by our guests and volunteers last year. Coffee will be served form 10:30 on and a buffet dinner form 11:30-1:30. Extra pies, desserts or cookies would be so welcome.



Keeping It Real at Christmas by Rev. Geoffrey Black General Minister and President of the UCC

As I greet you this Advent/Christmas season, my UCC sisters and brothers and our extended family, I am more mindful than ever of the vast array of ministry and mission settings and circumstances in which people of the United Church of Christ are engaged. Having spent the last year traveling throughout our church in an effort to deepen and expand my own understanding of the rich diversity that is our communion, both here in the United States and abroad, I am particularly mindful of the expansive range of traditions and activities that lend expression to faith and faithfulness at this time of year.

Christmas is celebrated in so many different ways. The traditions in farming communities might vary from those in the cities. The feel of the Christmas holiday is different in Hawaii, Florida or California than it is in New England, Wisconsin or Montana, Haiti or Lebanon. It might have a different feel in a Samoan church and community than it would in an African American church and community. These are just a few of the vast array of settings that could be named as UCC settings of community and ministry. Yet in each and every setting, there is the same story held in common – that of the birth of Jesus.

In its fullness, the nativity story is about beauty, intrigue, suffering, risk and sacrifice along with the realities of immigration and poverty. It gives cause for hope and expresses our yearning for peace. Additionally, there is an overarching theme of God's intervening love and the joy it inspires. For me this provides an explanation for that wide range of Christmas expression that goes beyond where we are on the planet, and the traditions of our communities and cultures.

The wonder and majesty of the Christmas season persists in the face of commercialization that is, at times, overwhelming. It continues to endure in spite of the harsh realities of life – the truth that we remain a nation at war this year as last, that unemployment is high throughout the nation and even higher among African Americans and Latinos/as, or that poverty surrounds the life circumstances of an increasing number of America's children. In spite of unfair and unjust immigration laws, the Christmas season lifts our sights.

In truth, the Christmas story that we tell and retell is not far removed from harsh realities. After all, it is about some poor people who, with their newborn baby, had to flee across international borders to seek safety. The child's life was endangered by a fearful and enraged tyrant. We imagine the beauty of a night sky and a guiding star. We admire the faithfulness and hope of those who came to worship this child and bring him gifts fit only for God's anointed. They understood that God was doing something special, thus they were deemed wise. In all of this, God's love and compassion for humanity is evident. That is the element that lifts this story above all others, causing it to endure over millennia. It even speaks to us now.

You see, at the core of the season for us is that story. It isn't just any story, it is God's story and it has a way of engaging our spirits, jump-starting our imaginations and energizing our endeavors to love and serve God by rendering loving service to others, and by sharing the gifts of God in as many ways as we can. There is the beauty and drama of worship in this season. Of course, there are also the delights for children and other loved ones. There are greetings for friends and coworkers near and far. However, beyond these joys of the season, there are the many acts of service and sharing that make Christmas a blessing to the world.

So let's keep it real! In wishing you a blessed Advent and Christmas season, I trust that we will hear the story anew and let it again inspire us to be about ministry and mission in the name of the one whose birth is at the heart of the story – Jesus the Christ!

Peace and blessings to you in the joyous season.

Geoffrey A. Black

MERRY CHRISTMAS AND HAPPY NEW YEAR



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