Pastoral Letter  Rev. Carrie Bail

Dear Friends:

I’m filled with the joy of anticipation for our upcoming third Sunday of Advent, lighting the candle of Joy, because now that we are reaching the fullness of this season, we will share the gift, in collective silence, of listening for the voice of our God. You heard during worship last Sunday how members of the Discerning Prayer group found themselves deeply moved by our Monday night sessions, so much so that they want you all to experience it. And so, we shall do so, between 10:30 to 11 a.m. on Sunday. Please join us with a willingness to open your hearts and your spirits. (See article below describing what will happen.)

I am quite recovered from last week’s bout with a garden-variety head cold, clutching my negative COVID test and re-invigorated for the holiday season. I’m also grateful to the Rev. Greg Dawson for his last-minute substitution for me on Sunday Dec.5th. In these days of continuing uncertainty with regard to health, there is no shame in calling to cancel any sort of appointment, as we respond with the greatest degree of kindness to help keep our neighbors safe from our potential germs.

Looking forward to seeing you soon!

Your pastor, Carrie

DESCRIPTION OF THE DISCERNING PRAYER GROUP’S PROCESS
(Derived from The Prayer Model by Jane Vennard)

Before the meeting, one person is designated as “The Seeker.” That means that he or she has a question or a pondering, ideally something that has both a personal and a communal aspect to it.

An example: our own Dean, long-time youth leader and advocate, brought the concern of how he could continue his passion of working with youth in the current configuration of the church. He then dove into wondering what it is that teens are now seeking, asking how we could best meet their needs and their questions.

The physical arrangement is as follows: a simple table is in the center of the room with a single candle. Chairs are arranged in a special way around it, four in the inner circle. The Seeker takes one of these places, and three “Responders” take the others. It is the job of the Responders to listen VERY carefully to the Seeker’s question and then speak a short response which both reflects what they heard the Seeker asking and perhaps probes a bit further into the subject with more questions. There is also a “timekeeper” whose task it is to follow a very regular schedule of silent reflection.

Everyone else is one more circle-layer back: all are “Compassionate Observers” who do not speak during the process, but who pray constantly for the Seeker and for the Responders. It is their purpose to create a safe container for the silent listening prayer in the room. Confidence is kept by all who are present.

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The participants do not have to keep track of time: it is done for them by a Timekeeper with a chime. After an opening prayer comes 3 minutes of silence, the Seeker speaks for around 5 minutes, there are 3 more minutes of silence, then the Responders each speak for a few minutes, followed by yet another 3 minutes of silence. The Seeker then responds briefly to their comments followed by 1 more minute of silence and an Amen.

The entire group then disbands to one large circle for a process of debriefing. We have found that the conversation which follows is very deep and thought-provoking.

At the beginning there will be a guided prayer for all of us who are unaccustomed to so much silence, with the intention of quieting the internal chatter we all have. And that’s it!

WORSHIP LIVESTREAMED INSIDE THE SANCTUARY

To worship, join us masked in the sanctuary or at the below livestream link: http://www.facebook.com/churchontherotary/

CHRISTMAS EVE CANDLELIGHT SERVICES

On Friday, December 24th we will hold 2 Christmas Eve services.

5 p.m. Family Service with preludes starting at 4:45 p.m.
10 p.m. Communion Service

YOUTH CHOIR

We are hoping to have a Youth Choir sing a song or two at the 5:00 p.m. service on Christmas Eve. All young-uns are welcome - even TEENS!

Please see Deb Salli if you have a child/teen who may be interested. There will be one rehearsal on Saturday, December 18th from 10-11:00 a.m. and on Thursday, December 23rd from 6-7:00 p.m. You can email Deb at musicandtheatricalcoaching@gmail.com.

LOOKING AHEAD

- December 8 Business and Finance Meeting @ 7 p.m. by Zoom
- December 12 Third Sunday of Advent
- December 17 Cabinet meeting @ 7 p.m. by Zoom

THE SEASON IS ALL ABOUT GIVING

It’s not too late!! We hope to make the holiday special for 3 families in need right here in East Longmeadow. When you are out shopping, please pick up a gift card, or 2, or 3. YOU decide… anything from a restaurant, the grocery store, the gas station, the pharmacy…YOU decide! Your caring and generosity will brighten the day, or lighten the load for others less fortunate. We need your gift cards before Sunday December 19th. Thanks for caring and giving.
WARM CLOTHES

WOW the response was wonderful, both from our caring church members as well as the East Longmeadow community. We delivered 22 bags of everything warm, from coats to boots, to the Springfield Rescue Mission. The men unloading the cars were so overwhelmed by the volume...they couldn't thank us enough. We also put together a large bag of children's hats, scarves, gloves, mittens and socks that will soon be delivered to Kensington School for any children in need.

THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU!!

EACH ONE REACH ONE

Do you know someone who might enjoy a phone call, an e-mail or text message to let them know you are thinking of them? Maybe they would like to read a "snail mail" note. At this busy season if you send Christmas cards, why not add an extra one to a church friend or member to brighten their day? Cards and envelopes are available in the blue box on the table in the breezeway for you to use. Let's keep reaching out and letting folks know that they are appreciated and remembered. Addresses of members and friends may be found in the church directory from the office.

ADDRESS UPDATES

PLEDGE BOXES ARE READY FOR PICK UP!

If you requested a box of pledge envelopes for 2022, it is ready for you to pick up. The boxes are located on the sanctuary side of the church in the basement level which is underneath the narthex by the coat racks.
CHRISTMAS MEMORIALS AND CELEBRATIONS
The flower committee and the board of deacons invite you to remember and honor loved ones or offer celebration of a joyous event by purchasing a poinsettia to decorate the Sanctuary on Christmas. In addition to or as an alternative to purchasing a poinsettia we invite you to make a contribution to the Open Pantry. The cost of the plants are $10 and we suggest the Open Pantry donation be of an equal or greater amount.

Please use the form below to indicate your choice and make a notation on your check as to whether your donation is for a poinsettia or Open Pantry. All donors will be listed in the Christmas bulletins if we receive your donation by December 20th. Poinsettias may be taken from the Sanctuary after the 10:00 P.M. Christmas Eve service.

For Christmas Memorials & Celebrations, please use this donation form:

In Memory of____________________________________________________
In Celebration of________________________________________________
Given by_________________________________________________________
My choice is Poinsettia_______ Open Pantry_________

NOTE OF THANKS

FOR OUR PRAYERS

- Prayers for the grieving families in Oxford, Michigan and continued prayers to address the crisis of mass violence in our schools and in our culture at large
- Prayers for our world as we continue to navigate the implications of this fast-moving virus
- Prayers for all those who find themselves to be refugees despite the coming cold of winter

PRAYER

O God of hope, bring us to this moment of prayer with a certainty that you will never leave us, never expect us to suffer alone. O God of peace, bring us into your presence with a silence that surpasses and alleviates the human tendency of talking too much. Allow us to feel your warm embrace, and ensure that we pass on that love to others in need of it. A MEN.

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