

>>> SOUTH CHURCH ANDOVER NEWSLETTER <<<

THE CIRCLE



boldly embodying God's love and compassion



What is Prayer?

Together, we'll approach prayer with a dash of curiosity and a twist of experimentation

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Pastor Dana offers an invitation to listen, learn, and experiment with prayer this Lent...

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A NOTE FROM DANA

>>> SPOKEN OR SILENT?

At a red light or in a hospital room?

Written or embodied?

On a meditation cushion or a church pew?

Back in Jesus' day, people were wondering the same thing we often get curious about...what's the best way to pray? So the disciples asked Jesus, "Teach us how to pray."



Jesus responds by teaching them a prayer that we recite in worship every week (Our Father, who art in heaven...) Whether you use the language of debtors, trespassers or sinners, the Lord's Prayer is familiar to most of us.

In a few short lines, this prayer acknowledges human imperfection, asks for help and forgiveness, and gives praise. Jesus teaches his followers this prayer because it is simple and to-the-point. He wants them to know that their words don't need to be fancy or flowing. In fact, he warns his listeners, "When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases...for your God knows what you need before you ask."

Poet Mary Oliver offers us some much needed permission and freedom when it comes to prayer:

*just
pay attention, then patch*

*a few words together and don't try
to make them elaborate, this isn't
a contest but the doorway*

Prayer isn't a contest, it's a doorway.

If God doesn't exist separate from our real lives, then prayer shouldn't either. It can be less complicated and more powerful than you might realize. In fact, you might already be praying more than you know!

In Hebrew, the word *ruach* means both spirit and breath. So prayer can be as simple as breathing. Prayer can be breathing in the goodness of God and breathing out the stress and frustration of life. Prayer can be a sacred pause at a red light and the whispered word, "thanks" or a soft cry of "help."

Prayer can be something lived, felt, acted on—without ever saying a word. Prayer is the language of relationship, sometimes it requires words, spoken and honest and from the heart. Other times, you take a deep breath and trust that the Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words and *that* is your prayer.

Over the next 40 days of Lent, South Church will explore the topic: "What is Prayer?" You are invited to listen, learn, and experiment with prayer. Pastor Genna & I will be preaching on how prayer is personal, communal, imperfect, and continuous. We'll also have a special guest preacher, The Rev. Dr. Mary Luti who will preach on St. Patrick and the power of prayer (on March 17th). In this newsletter, you'll find many ways to dive deeper into prayer this Lenten season. I invite you to get curious about how you might try out a new prayer practice over these 40 days.

Blessings on the journey through this sacred season,

Dana

THIS LENT, TOGETHER, WE ASK, “WHAT IS PRAYER?”

This Lenten season, consider stopping by for a blessing and ashes on Ash Wednesday; joining us for worship at 10AM on Sundays (in-person or on YouTube) and at 7PM on Maundy Thursday. Pick up our Lenten guidebook in the office or download it online as we journey together asking “What is Prayer?”. Visit southchurch.com/Lent.

Prayer Stations We encourage you to explore diverse methods of prayer this season by visiting our prayer stations. Each week, a different prayer station will be set up in the parlor and available from after worship Sunday through to Saturday night.

Lenten Guidebook The guidebook is a tool to help you in your journey. On its own or in combination with other practices, we hope the readings, questions, and prayers will inspire deeper personal reflection. The book is an invitation to explore the scripture readings for each Sunday and to dive deeper into our theme of “What is Prayer?”.

Art Journaling Through Lent Wednesdays at 7:00PM in our library

Learn something new (instead of giving something up)! Art journaling is a mixed media free form of spirit onto paper. Each week, we will explore a piece of Scripture and be led in an easy and colorful prompt. This course is for everyone, whether you consider yourself an artist or not. Please join us in this sacred practice of Creativa Divina and see where Art and Spirit take us. Register at southchurch.com/Lent.

Ash Wednesday, February 14th If you would like to receive ashes and a blessing as we prepare our hearts to welcome Lent, we have two options to offer.

9:00AM-4:00PM stop by and come in any time

12:30-1:00PM drive through the front circle drive

Palm Sunday, March 24th

Worship at 10:00AM followed by brunch, petting zoo, egg hunt

Maundy Thursday, March 28th

Worship at 7:00PM in-person and online

Easter Sunday, March 31st Worship

6:15AM outdoor (sunrise service in front of South Church)

10:00AM (in the Sanctuary)

ALL MEMBERS ARE MINISTERS

Dana Allen Walsh, Senior Pastor
Genevieve Hosterman, Associate Pastor
Sherry Tupper, Minister of Visitation
Cathy Meyer, Minister of Music
Taylor Graffum, Minister of Youth and Families
Nora Pelt, Communications Administrator

Joanne Smith, Finance Administrator
Andy Brien, Facilities Manager
Brian Gruhn, Engagement Coordinator
David Strong, Moderator
Janna Roop, Treasurer



A DOOR-OPENER



REFLECTING 20 YEARS AFTER THE OPEN & AFFIRMING VOTE

By Rev. Dana Allen Walsh, Senior Pastor

It was a cold and dark Wednesday evening—January 28th, 2004. More than 400 church members packed into our sanctuary. After years of conversation, prayer, and discussion, the top agenda item of the 293rd Annual Meeting of South Church in Andover was a motion to become an Open & Affirming Congregation.

In UCC lingo, this is when a congregation offers an explicit welcome and affirmation of LGBTQ+ folk as full members of the church. College kids cut classes and got rides back to Andover so they could vote. The confirmation class sat together with Jonathan Drury to observe the process.

Households showed up divided and torn by this issue. Some stayed home for fear of being hurt by the remarks of fellow church members. There was great anticipation and and trepidation that night. Everyone had to be signed in to the meeting. The press were asked to identify themselves.

Seven people spoke for the motion and seven spoke against it. Each was held to a strict two minute limit.

As paper ballots were counted, the congregation sang hymns, alternating between the red and blue hymnals. The moderator, Nick Warne, was clear that there would be no applause or response to the outcome—instead The Rev. Dr. Calvin F. Mutti, Senior Pastor, led them in prayer.

With a final tally of 240-161, South Church became an Open & Affirming Congregation. We were one of the first in the Merrimack Valley—one of the first in the country. This was before most churches were ordaining gay folk or opening membership to all. But it wasn't easy. In the wake of the vote, people left the church. There was a major capital campaign which floundered. There was a needed time for grief and healing and finding the way forward.

When asked to reflect on the moment, Rev. Mutti said, "It was courageous and risky...It was a door-opener that we couldn't appreciate in the moment."

The rainbow and trans flags in front of our church have made people feel more safe in the town of Andover, even without ever stepping into our sanctuary. Most of the people who come through our doors remark about our inclusive welcome. Most of our clergy and staff members would never have served here without that vote.

Without a doubt, it's been a door-opener.



»»» HABITS/ROUTINES/RITUALS

By Brian Gruhn, Engagement Coordinator

I began serving as South Church's Engagement Coordinator this past July. This experimental role was created in an attempt to adjust to the retirement of the church's faithful, longtime Office Administrator, Linda Hacker, while also providing a staff position dedicated to managing the expansive volunteer service needs and opportunities South Church is so blessed with. It's a position that I applied to fill because it seemed to be aligned with my personal journey. When the Covid pandemic began, I was a full-time pastor with a newborn son to care for. The demands of my work, my commitments as a partner and a parent, and the added weight of pandemic living amounted to a perfect storm of dysfunction. In an effort to learn how to live in this new time, I was blessed with a wonderful Occupational Therapist. We met twice a month on Zoom and slowly, over a long period of time, she was able to show me how I can make slight changes to my personal habits, routines, and rituals in order to live differently. Within a couple years, I had quit my job, moved my family to South Berwick, ME...and then I applied for the position of Engagement Coordinator at South Church.

I have spent the last 6 months listening to as many people, groups, and ministries as possible here at South Church, and what I have discovered is that we are all seeking similar things: Connection and Belonging. Whether we are looking for new companions, longing to connect with beloved friends, seeking folks to serve coffee on a Sunday morning, or organizing communities to fight for justice, life and health for all, we all want to be more deeply connected, belonging to people and work beyond ourselves. And yet, every day, we continue to live in an environment in which technology, economics, and all manner of cultural trends make it easier to remain isolated from each other. How do we hope to "coordinate" our engagement with ourselves, one another, and our God with so many obstacles in our way? We can take the OT approach: make small changes to our collective habits, routines, and rituals that will, eventually, lead us somewhere new.

»»» THE HABIT OF CURIOSITY

Every day, we practice countless habits, tiny actions that become so familiar we don't even think about them as we do them. Let's make curiosity a habit. What is going on in the lives of others? What opportunities are there to connect? Am I feeling uncomfortable or dissatisfied? Why? Let's get curious...and do it enough that it becomes a habit.

»»» ROUTINE LISTENING

A routine is just a long series of habits. Most churches have many routines regarding how we preach and teach. We are well versed in letting the world know what is happening in our community, and lifting up all the fun things we are up to. Now we need to adopt a routine of listening: What are the cries in the world? What are the needs of our neighbor? What is God calling us to set down or pick up? The more ways we find for listening to one another, the better equipped we will be to find common solutions to common problems.

»»» RITUALIZED RECEIVING

Engagement is really about quality relationships. Relationships are built on the pattern of mutual offering and receiving, receiving and offering. We are a community of generous givers; we are glad to give of our time, our energy, our treasures...but how many of us are willing to receive from others? If we want to develop deeper connections with one another, then we are not just encouraged to go on Service Central and sign up to offer service...we are also encouraged to receive love, care and service from others when we have need. The next time you have a need in your life, you are invited to reach out to a pastor or someone in the church office, name your need, and let us help create a ritual for you to receive the support, the care, the companionship that you need to receive.

Slowly, over time, even tiny changes to our habits, routines and rituals can lead to major changes in our individual and communal lives. This is my prayer. Let this be our prayer.

INWARD, OUTWARD AND FORWARD...INCREMENTALLY!

A Green Team Update from Co-Chairs Mark Bohrer and Candy Dann

South Church is intentional about being good stewards of God's planet. At this year's Chili Cookoff, when Char Lyons spoke in Fellowship Hall, she talked about how the Cookoff organizers are working – incrementally – to have less waste by moving to compostable cups, and looking for a composting service to take the cups and the plant and meat waste for compost. This search is underway. The first incremental step this year was to use up the non-compostable stuff we already had. It was heartening to hear this, and to hear the goal and intention. Small steps, but always moving forward!

Looking Inward – Incremental Steps to Start Decarbonizing our Church

That same word “incremental” came up in the discussions to decarbonize the church this past year. In 2022, the Green Team funded Norian/Siani Engineering to do a study on converting the church to heat pumps. As the options in the report showed, it's a big project and a lot to think about, so we asked – “Could incremental “decarbonization” work?” They said “yes” that an incremental approach is reasonable. For example, an incremental approach could be installing air-source heat pumps for the first floor of the church. It would solve one heating system reliability issue we're facing, add comfort and also be a step to a sustainable church. The Facilities Team is considering this and other options and hoping to be able to implement it in the near future. The pace depends on the availability of funds so they need the support of the church!

Looking Outward – Sharing Ideas on Going Green in our Homes and Lives – Step by Step

Starting this February, the Green Team will have a table in Fellowship Hall each month to share ideas on a range of green topics. Our goal is to partner with members of the congregation – to share what we've learned and what you've learned (and done!) on things like:

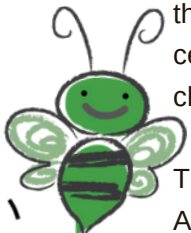
- Where can I learn about subsidies that are available for insulation, windows or heat pumps for my home?
- How do I decide if an EV or a plug-in hybrid is right for me? What's involved in wiring up my garage or home for charging an EV?
- Should I think about switching to an electric induction stovetop?
- How can I make my yard and garden more welcoming to native species?
- How can I move toward a more plant-based diet, without giving up the tastes and flavors I like?

Looking Forward – Incremental Ways to Fund the Sustainable Church

In 2022, the church created the Green Future Fund. It is similar to other dedicated funds like Memorial Gifts, the Music Reserve, and others. It is open to anyone who wants to make a donation – as a memorial or a celebration or other event. The purpose of the Green Future Fund is to support the transition to a sustainable church, in keeping with our core belief to be good stewards of God's creation for all generations.

This year the church is gathering input from church members and exploring options for a Capital Campaign. Aspects of that campaign involve major facilities work the church needs, and most would move the church forward on the road to being fully sustainable.

Whether it's steps small or large, South Church finds ways to live our faith, always moving forward.



WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST MEMBERS

»»» ANDREA DESAULNIERS AND PHIL MEAGHER

Andrea and Phil are drawn to South Church because they are interested in forming meaningful connections with people in the Andover community. They also find joy in helping others and volunteering. Andrea and Phil both love hiking, reading, and their dog, Zoe.



»»» TAYLOR GRAFFUM

Taylor is our Minister for Children and Families, and has been a part of our church community for the past 2 and a half years. They are currently a Master's Student at Boston University School of Theology, and are seeking ordination in the UCC.



»»» BARBARA MARTIN

Born in Greenfield, MA, Barbara has lived in Massachusetts all her life. She has two sons and a daughter, as well as three step children and twelve grandchildren. Barbara taught high school biological sciences for 40 years primarily at Medfield High School. She enjoys crafts and is an avid reader. Last spring, Barbara moved to Edgewood Retirement Community.



»»» GAIL RALSTON AND BOB DECELLE

Gail and Bob are both very active in the Andover community. Gail comes from a long and varied faith journey, but says that coming back to South Church feels like "coming home." She has three children and seven grandchildren. Bob is a retired firefighter, who now works at Home Depot part time and volunteers with Andover Conservation. He enjoys woodworking in his spare time.



continued

WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST MEMBERS

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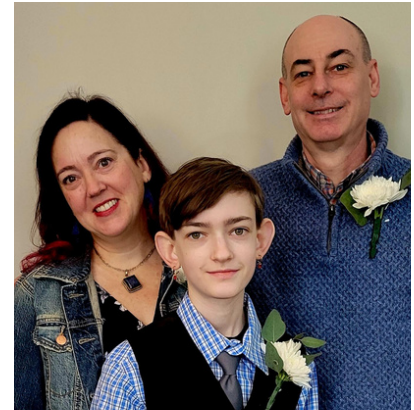
»»» MICHELLE RHEE, MICHAEL WEISE, AND THEIR KIDS, NOE AND LOGAN.

The Weise family has lived in Andover since 2016 and have been fixing up their house since then. It's a never-ending project, but it's worth it because of the community they live in, where neighboring children are always walking through their doors. The Weise family was delighted to learn more about South Church in late spring of 2023 and have been coming regularly since. They love the unabashed inclusivity of the messages at South Church.



»»» LAUREN AND SCOTT SPRAGUE, AND THEIR KIDS, MAGGIE AND SEAN

Lauren Sprague is a professional singer, educator and writer. Her original musical entitled "Parts of Me" about one woman's journey to mental health, premiered in March of 2023. Lauren has recently joined the South Church choir. Scott Sprague is a Senior Principal Scientist at Pfizer - he also plays guitar, and his favorite genre is heavy metal. Sean Sprague is an 8th grader at Doherty Middle School. He has enjoyed being a part of the youth group with Taylor. He takes piano lessons, plays hockey, is in the drama club at school and enjoys drawing. Maggie Sprague is a Freshman at Pace University in NYC. She is a Biology major and she enjoys babysitting, writing songs, reading and doing crafts. Maggie was unable to be with us in person today, but is joining virtually this morning. Welcome, Maggie!



»»» LORI ANNE WYCKOFF AND MIKE ROTTMAN

Lori Wyckoff and Mike Rottman met and married while they were both serving in the US Air Force. Mike retired in 2005 and went to work for a defense contractor in southern NH. Lori is a memoirist, musician, and ordained UCC minister. Lori and Mike have lived in Andover since 2018 with their two cats. They have three adult children and a future son-in-law.



CHILI COOKOFF 2023

THE WALSH FAMILY IS GOING TO NEED A BIGGER FIREPLACE MANTEL

2023 WINNERS

Best Chili AND Best Name:

Sean Walsh and Amanda Walsh "Chili-delphia"

Best Chowder/Soup:

Heather Green "Corn Chowder w/ Bacon"

Best Veggie:

Mark Bohrer "Where There's Smoke"

Best Kid:

Leighton Walsh "We're Not Kidding Around"

Spiciest:

Glen Green "Trinidad Chili" (even grew his own hot peppers!)

Leighton Walsh also received an Honorable Mention for the most stickers on a page.

Sean Walsh and his sister, Amanda Walsh received an Honorable Mention for best presentation, providing homemade onion bits and homemade cheese sauce (called "Whiz") served in its own crock pot.





CARING

>>> CONDOLENCES TO

- Nora Pelt on the death of her father **Timothy Lawrence** on November 30th.
- Mary Kate Bronder and family on the death of her mother **Mary Gangemi** on December 28th.
- Gary Muise and family on the death of his mother **Bernadette Muise** on January 29th.

>>> WE CELEBRATE

- the birth of **Natalie Floreen Wright** in November to parents Ashley and John. Grandparents are Carol and David Floreen.

>>> IN GRATITUDE

Thank you for your donation to help further our mission to build new homes so that deserving families can build new lives. Sincerely, Kevin Hudson, Dir. of Charitable Giving Essex County Habitat for Humanity

Ruth Bodge (wife of The Rev. Dr. J. Everett Bodge South Church Senior Pastor 1968-1977) is very grateful for the support that South Church has shown to her. We are very blessed in so many ways. Thank you all for the love and prayers. *The Bodge Family*

I was honored that Linda Hacker brought such a beautiful poinsettia to me all the way up in Maine. It meant so much to me. *Sally Hudgins*

Thank you for coordinating the "wish list" initiative for our children at Manos Felices! The children were delighted and we were overwhelmed by your thoughtfulness and generosity in ensuring a very Merry Christmas for each child. *Blessings, Lee Schurter, Executive Director*

Thank you for your donation to Honduras Hope. Your previous gifts mean electricity has arrived in Plan Grande! You have literally saved lives as the roads were unlit and dangerous before. *Blessings always, Bill Briggs, USA Coordinator*

Many thanks for your most generous donation to Only A Child supporting Guatemala and the wider world! *Jean Kiser, Board of Directors*

Thank you so much! From Halloween to Christmas, your community has played an enormous part in ensuring the kids at Little Heroes Home had a magical holiday season. *Best, Kayla DiGiantommaso, Director*

I want to express my gratitude for this community that actively embracing my parents during my dad's cancer treatment. You helped my heart and mind be at ease. *Suzie Clarke Allen*

Thank you for your generous donation to the Northeast Association general fund to support ministries and program right here in our corner of Massachusetts. *In gratitude, Rev. Adam Isbitsky Treasurer*

What a surprise when David Keene arrived for a visit with Thanksgiving goodies. *Thank you, Marty Doyle*

Thank you for your support allowing Lazarus House Ministries to continue serving our Guests with dignity and respect. *Gratefully, Carmen H. Vega*

Thank you for your thoughtful contribution to A Better Chance. You play an important role in the development of the leaders of tomorrow. *Sincerely, Bonnie Zahorik, President*

THE STEEPLE IS LIT IN LOVING MEMORY OF

11



>>> IN MARCH

Raymond F. Hopkinson III

by his wife Carol and family

>>> IN APRIL

Joseph and Rose Big

by their daughter Susan Big and granddaughter Alicia Bursey

Loved ones

by the Ziegenbein, Collins, Kea, Flint, and
Brosnan families

*Please let us know if you would like to "light the steeple" in
memory of one of your loved ones.*

>>> WITH A GRATEFUL, HEAVY HEART

It is with a heavy heart that I write to inform you that I will be retiring at the end of the school year, and after 42 wonderful years, our beloved Andover Rompers Nursery School will sadly close. Rompers was established in 1982 and in 1992, South Church became our forever home under Barbara Ormsby's tutelage. We could not have asked for a better partnership and environment to run our little nursery school where over 1,000 children began their educational journey.

Rompers has been my passion for 30 years and my great pleasure to be a part of a loving, positive learning environment. My life has been enriched for many years by the exuberance and joy of young children and watching their little personalities emerge, confidence grow, and friendships develop.

On behalf of the Andover Rompers Nursery School, I wish to thank you for providing a wonderful space for our children for over 30 years. We are beyond thankful.

With a grateful heart, Norma Cratty, Director

100% CHANCE OF RAIN

WORDS & MUSIC
BY WALTER HORSLEY

Presented by
the South Church
Youth Music Ministry

May 12, 2024 | 10AM

MONTHLY MISSION UPDATE

Nov: NEADS
\$2,660

Dec: IINE
\$5,976

Samaritan Fund
\$1,938 (2023 Fifth Sundays)

THANK
YOU!