

A MESSAGE FROM OUR SENIOR MINISTER EMERITUS

Rev. Dennis R. Knight

Dear Friends,

There is a geography to the interior of Pakachoag Church that reveals a great deal about how the Church understands itself.

The worship area is located in the center of the building, and is the largest single space within the structure. This is to be expected as worship is the centering function of a church, and everything else about the building comes to rest there. At Pakachoag, however, this room is surrounded by a diversity of spaces that are given over to a whole complex of activities, and this tells "the rest of the story."

For example, there is a wing dedicated to educational activities. That space is utilized all week long. Other space is allocated to offices and administrative functions. Additional areas, such as the social hall, hex room, and parlor, support public functions. There is a large kitchen, which enhances the ability of the Church to underwrite an array of community activities.

This diversity to Pakachoag's "geography" attests that this Church does not function in a bipolar world, where the holy and the profane exist in different realms. Rather, they exist in a unified world, as the building with its multiplicity of functions stands as a unified structure, and is in the whole "the Church." We understand that a life of faith is a full time activity, encompassing all aspects of living. Even the Great Hall, which serves as a corporate worship center on Sunday mornings, is designed to serve other purposes at other times.

A particularly noteworthy aspect of the building is the number of entrances. There are seven doorways into Pakachoag. Thus, a person can find his or her way into this community and its activities through a diversity of entry points. Worship, music, education, social life, or mission may be the first draw, but all of these are related, and any one entry point can lead to all the others.

Some faith traditions have strict requirements for entry, and narrow perspectives on what qualifies a person for admission. This approach essentially offers only one entrance. Frequently, this doorway is creedalin nature. It requires persons to subscribe to a fixed religious point of view or a certain set of precepts and conventions. Pakachoag's tradition

stands in counterpoint to this. Like the building itself, Pakachoag's doctrinal stance affirms that there are a variety of valid ways to engage and express faith, and that in fact diversity is enriching and keeps the religious landscape dynamic and relevant.

In this season of Lent, each of us is called to an encounter with her or his beliefs. Each of us is called to examine the foundations of his or her religious precepts and underpinnings, and test those values against timeless standards. I encourage you in the weeks ahead to examine the configuration of your own personal faith, and perhaps to use the "geography" of Pakachoag Church, with its variety of rooms and many entry points, as a model for understanding your own faith structure.



2nd INFORMAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

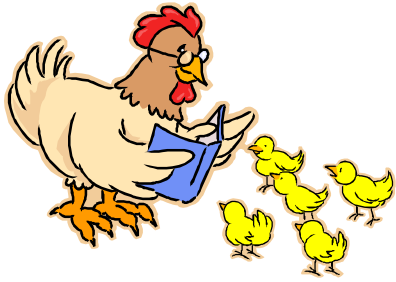
To Members of Pakachoag Church:

There will be a second informal gathering of the congregation following worship and a light lunch on **Sunday, February 11**. It was agreed at the meeting in January to schedule a monthly time for everyone to share thoughts and ideas about how we function as a church.

The January gathering was open-ended. The February meeting is planned to have some free time for members to speak to any subject of interest, but there will be a structured time to begin as well. The staff, Paulo, Dee, and Dennis, will offer a brief summary of their work activities and their goals for the immediate future within their work areas.

Also, the congregation needs to respond to Chottsie Cote's reminder that Pakachoag has to decide whether to participate in the Interfaith Hospitality Network Program this summer. Lastly, Jeff LaBonte has indicated he has a program idea he would like to advance. Please plan on joining in at this time. Your participation is vital and welcome.





CHILDREN'S STORY TIME

(stories, crafts and a light snack)
at our church

Saturdays mornings
10:00-11:15 AM

starting February 16 (no story time
on Saturday, March 22)

Geared for ages 2-6, but open to all.
This activity is free.



LENTEN BIBLE STUDY

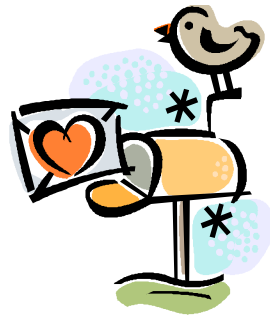
Our Lenten Bible Study will begin on **Sunday, February 24** at 9:00 AM. A light breakfast will be available along with child care. Join us as we look at the prayer Jesus taught his disciples "The Lord's Prayer Then and Now."



FAMILY MINISTRY ACTIVITY - "Cards for our troops"

Join us on **February 24** following worship for a light lunch and card making for our soldiers. It would also be nice to put together some care packages. A list of items we could contribute will be on the bulletin board.

Everyone is invited to participate.



WOMEN'S NIGHT OUT

In celebration of the United Church of Christ's Women's Week, we will gather together on **Friday, February 29** (Sadie Hawkins Day) for a covered dish supper and a movie starting at 6:30 PM.

Bring along your favorite dish/salad/dessert and join us for a time of fellowship and celebration of the many gifts we as women bring to the church.

Rev. Dee has a couple of ideas for movies but would love to hear from your thoughts about this. If babysitting is needed, please let Dee know. A sign up sheet is on the bulletin board.



FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

- 3 David Stebbins
- 5 Peg Gifford
- 14 Avilla Clarkson
- 20 Alex Carlson



SOUPER BOWL OF CARING

Thank you to all who took part in our celebration of the Souper Bowl. We raised \$38.32 to be sent to Auburn Youth and Family Services in Auburn.

Special thanks you ...

Cathy & Lynn Blanchard for the delicious corn chowder and the festive Patriots cake.

Kathy Papineau for the mini corn breads – yummy!

Carolyn Krefl for her famous Italian Wedding Soup. Also thank you Carolyn for setting up our luncheon and for clean up.



WHAT ABOUT GOD?

by Lynn Blanchard

I'd like to tell you a story about a small church I know of. This happened years ago, but it was a lesson, I'll hold with me always. There was a conflict, and people started to lose their focus on what really mattered. They became lost in problems of the church and they forgot what was truly important. Soon the church began to have financial problems, and before too long money is what the services were about.

Sunday morning messages were given about the importance of tithing. Each week during fellowship they'd have a 50/50 raffle, a bake sale, or even an extra offering to try and come up with the money to support the building. It didn't take long for people to stop coming to service. They were tired, and quite frankly, broke.

There were people at this little church giving so much of themselves it made you stop in wonder. They were always at the church, repairing damaged walls, cleaning, tending to the garden. Every event the church had, they were there to lend a hand. But to some in the church, this was simply not enough. It came to the point where they were told, point blank, "Your time and talent aren't enough. We need your money."

Some tried to focus on the spiritual, to bring God back to the church, but the focus had turned to the material and the congregation had lost its way. When money started to rule the services, God was, at best, an afterthought. As you can imagine, this church soon closed its doors. The financial burdens were far too heavy, and the members left were far too few. They had forgotten what church was supposed to be about.

This is not the end of this story though. You see there were a few faithful, who refused to let their church go. They had no house of worship, their congregation had dwindled to only a handful of people and those left were hurting and lost. What they did have though was a burning desire to go on. Maybe it was faith, or perhaps even sheer stubbornness. They met on Sunday mornings in people's living rooms, somewhere different each week. After a short time, their numbers started to grow. It was necessary for them to rent a meeting room at a local hotel to fit the growing numbers. They were allowed to come in early to set up the sanctuary, but then had to break it down after each service.

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To those who came to set up and break down every week, it became almost ceremonial. It was their offering in the service of God. They were preparing the way for others to come and worship with them. Their membership continued to increase. Their focus was restored to services and to their worship. People heard of their struggle and of their faith, and wanted to a part of the celebration. They were attracted by their dedication and the message they were preaching without ever saying a word.

Now, several years later, this congregation of the faithful once again has a permanent house of worship. They have a healthy congregation and even an outreach program. They broadcast their services on local access television and share their faith and devotion with anyone who cares to tune in. Their purpose has become spreading the word of God and reaching out in fellowship.

It's easy to look back on the trials and triumphs of this little church and see how their burdens were merely a way to blessings. Or perhaps it was God's way of making good on a bad situation. But the story tells of their triumph only when their focus was set on God. Only when they focused their eyes on what was important could they see. Only when they listened, in faith, did they grow.

So many times in my life, I have felt lost and alone. I envisioned the worst thing that could happen to me, and when that was my focus, that is where my life went. Then I was reminded of my mantra; my core belief; the very source of my faith; **God does have a plan**. I know it sounds cliché, and some of you may not want to hear it. But that simple phrase...no, *believing* that simple phrase, has given me hope in the darkest of times and strength when facing my worst fears.

Make God the foundation you stand on, everyday, not only when you come to church or take time to pray. Make God your foundation in your relationships, in your work, and in your play. When you do, the ground beneath your feet will never crumble and you will never be alone.

I'll leave you this month with a quote from the book *Eat, Pray, Love* by Elizabeth Gilbert. "Look for God," suggested her guru. "Look for God like a man with his head on fire looks for water."

HEIFER PROJECT INTERNATIONAL

Our annual Heifer Project Fund drive **will begin on the first Sunday of Lent, February 10.** This year our focus will be on Heifer Project in El Salvador. Did you know our church custodian is from El Salvador? We will be raising money to purchase a pair of goats. Our goal is \$240. Please help by taking a Heifer Project bank and putting in your coins during the Lenten season. Everyone, adults and children, are encouraged to participate. Banks should be returned the Sunday after Easter (March 30).

The history of Heifer Project International

A Midwestern farmer named Dan West was ladling out rations of milk to hungry children during the Spanish Civil War when it hit him. "These children don't need a cup, they need a cow."

West, who was serving as a Church of the Brethren relief worker, was forced to decide who would receive the limited rations and who wouldn't – literally, who would live and who would die. This kind of aid, he knew, would never be enough.

So West returned home to form Heifers for Relief, dedicated to ending hunger permanently by providing families with livestock and training so that they "could be spared the indignity of depending on others to feed their children."

In 1944, the first shipment of 17 heifers left York, Pennsylvania, for Puerto Rico, going to families whose malnourished children had never even tasted milk.

Why heifers? These are young cows that haven't yet given birth – making them perfect not only for supplying a continued source of milk, but also for supplying a continued source of support. That's because each family receiving a heifer agrees to "pass on the gift" and donate the female offspring to another family, so that the gift of food is never-ending.

This simple idea of giving families a source of food rather than short-term relief caught on and has continued for over 60 years. Since 1944, Heifer has helped 7 million people in more than 125 countries.

COME AND JOIN IN THE FUN

Pakachoag Community Music School presents its 20th **annual fundraiser** "Thanks for the Memories" – a 20-year Cabaret retrospective with music of Bernstein, Gershwin, Hart, Kern & Rodgers & Hammerstein.



Featuring local professional favorites:

Bob Gauthier, Michael Gondek, Sal Luco, Richard Monroe, Mary Anne Slack, Eric Wefald and Stanley Wilson and PCMS alumni: Gregory Paradis, Elisabeth LaBarre Gondek and Jane Shivick.

Friday, March 28 1:00 PM Matinee Show
(Boxed lunch available for \$10)

Saturday, March 29 2:00 PM Matinee Show
7:00 PM Evening Show

Advance tickets are \$20 / \$15 seniors/students. Tickets purchased at the door, or held & paid at the door are \$25. Boxed lunch is \$10 (registration only; served 45 minutes prior to show times).

Table reservations available for parties of 8; must be secured 30 minutes prior to show times.

Proceeds support the music school's providing scholarships, pursuing outreach and keeping tuition accessible.

Join us for fabulous music, refreshments, and fun festivities. Win great raffle and silent auction items. Check the music schools' website (www.pakmusic.org) beginning March 1st for a listing of silent auction items. Items open for bidding one hour prior to show times.

JUST WHAT IS VALENTINE' DAY

Every February we celebrate Valentine's Day. We do this in honor of Saint Valentine.

One legend is that Valentine was a priest who served during third century Rome. There was an Emperor who decided that single men made better soldiers than those that were married. With this thought in mind he outlawed marriage for young men in hopes of building a stronger military base. Father Valentine decided this decree just wasn't fair. He chose to marry young couples secretly. When Emperor Claudius II found out about Valentine's actions he had him put to death.

Another legend has it that Valentine was an imprisoned man who fell in love with his jailor's daughter. Before he was put to death he sent the first 'valentine' himself when he wrote her a letter and signed it 'Your Valentine', words still used on cards today.

We'll never know the true identity of Valentine but this much is for sure...February has been the month to celebrate love for a long time, dating clear back to the Middle Ages when it was thought that birds chose their mates on February 14. . In fact, Valentine's Day ranks second only to Christmas in number of greeting cards sent.

The symbol of Valentine's Day is Cupid. In Roman mythology Cupid is the son of Venus, goddess of love. Cupid is often said to be a mischievous boy who goes around wounding both gods and humans with his arrows, causing them to fall in love.

HAPPY VALENTINE' S DAY



WHAT'S HAPPENING IN AUBURN

Food Pantry Trips

The Friends of the Auburn Senior Center is now funding a monthly trip to the North American Martyr's Food Pantry on the **3rd Saturday of the month** for elders and disabled residents. There is no charge for either the food or transportation, but reservations are a must. Please call 508-832-7799 to be put on the van schedule.

North American Birds of Prey

The Auburn Birdbanding Research Station (www.auburnbirdbanding.org) will hold a program on North American Birds of Prey on **Sunday, March 2** at 2:00 p.m. at North American Martyrs Church Parish Hall, 8 Wyoma Drive. Wingmasters (www.wingmasters.net) will do the presentation. This program is free, open to the general public and is funded by the Auburn Foundation.

Light refreshments, bird literature, and bird-related auction items will be available. For further information, please call Marcia Reich at 508-757-5700.

Auburn Preschool Pre-Registration

If you are interested in having your child attend the Auburn Preschool Program and have not received an Early Childhood Newsletter, please call Lori E. Deso at 508-832-7755 for more information. All children who wish to attend the Preschool Program in September must participate in Preschool Screening.

