



The Old Meeting House

1620 Center Road

Montpelier, VT 05602

(802) 229-9593; admin@oldmeetinghouse.org

www.oldmeetinghouse.org

December 2011 Newsletter

Dear Friends –

The very first Christmas I ever celebrated as an ordained minister was a disaster. Of course, no one knew that but me. There had been severe miscommunications between the staff, which became clear as the opening music played, the hymn was finished, and it came time for the words of welcome and introduction to the service. But there was simply silence.

No one stepped forward.

I double checked my bulletin, and indeed, it was not my name printed next to this section of the service. 10 seconds stretched to 20. It became clear that the Pageant Director had assumed I would line someone up, I had assumed that someone was ready lined up, and the Administrator – failing to hear differently from either of us – had simply assumed the same person was to do each section as last year. Section after section it was the same, and each time the final measures of a song played, I didn't know whether to sit or stand – would I be expected to be the one speaking next?

I don't know if you've picked up on this yet, but I like to have things very – *very* – planned out. And so, three months into my life as clergy, I found myself living into my worst nightmare: 500 pairs of eyes were staring at me, and I had nothing to say. I remember next to nothing about the service, other than that feeling of white-hot adrenaline coursing through my body. I do, however, remember sitting in my colleague's office afterwards and her words of comfort. "Elissa," she said, "no one knew. I didn't know, and I've been doing this for 30 years." The words sounded hollow, and she could tell, and so she continued: "Besides, Jesus will always be born – with or without you, that baby is coming."

(Continued on page 2.)

ANTICIPATION: ADVENT

December 11

Joy Worship, 9:30 a.m.
Study Group, 10:45 a.m.

December 18

Love Pageant, 9:30 a.m.

December 24

Family Candlelight Worship, 5:00 p.m.
Traditional Candlelight Worship, 7:30 p.m.

ARRIVAL: CHRISTMAS

December 25

9:30 a.m. Lessons & Carols
Come in your PJs, and stay afterwards for hot chocolate!

January 1

9:30 a.m. 12 days of Christmas
That's right—Christmas is a whole 12-day season! Come celebrate the new year with your favorite carols.

LOOKING AHEAD: EPIPHANY

January 8

9:30 a.m. Festival of Lights
At this service, we celebrate the arrival of the magi (and our arrival, too!) at the manger. Giving thanks for the star, this is a service of light, light, and more light!

(Continued from Page 1)

It is this I remember most: *“Jesus will always be born – with or without you.”* Sometimes I think we try so hard to set the stage for a perfect Christmas – for a perfect party, meal, season (or worship service) – that we lose sight of what it is, in fact, that we are preparing for. Indeed, what I learned that year was that when we say, each Sunday in Advent, “prepare ye the way of the Lord,” it doesn’t mean preparing the way for Jesus. Jesus doesn’t need perfection to come – in fact, all he needs is a barn and some straw.

My “worst Christmas ever” actually turned out to be the biggest blessing thus far in my ministry. Not only did I discover that my worst nightmare was not, in fact, the end of the world, I also discovered an important truth: in Advent we are not preparing space for Jesus; we are not preparing space for hope, or peace, or joy or love. Those things are there, and always will be there. Jesus is born. Jesus *will be* born. The question is whether it will be with us or without us. What we are preparing the way for is *ourselves*.

Don’t get me wrong – our preparations, our traditions are important – but only inasmuch as the beautiful routines help us get of our own way. Do they help us or hinder us from seeing the miracles of the unexpected? So, in between all your planning for a perfect gathering, a perfect family reunion, a beautiful, snow-lit night – is there room to see a miracle in the unlikeliest places? In an unseasonably warm December? In a burnt meal, an imperfect Charlie Brown Christmas tree, or crazy shopping lines? Is there room to see a miracle in the ache for lost or departed loves? In an unexpectedly chaotic service? (Although, don’t worry – I’ve learned a lot about staff planning since then!) Or, most importantly, is there room to see a miracle in an impoverished, persecuted and bastard baby boy? If so, then to you I say this: Merry Christmas, indeed.

In preparation,

Elissa

Stewardship Update

Thank you, thank you for the 67 pledges that have been received so far! Thank you for making the commitment to the community of the Old Meeting House for the coming year. On average, there’s been a 13% increase from those folks who are renewing their pledges, and fifteen people/families are new (or returning after a hiatus). It is heartening to see the support grow.

There are 19 currently pledging people/families who haven’t sent in their green cards. We hope that you will dig them out and reread Elissa’s letter and the many comments in the brochure and give it great consideration. Stewardship pledge cards are also available in the church.

If you haven’t given a pledge before, and you regularly drop a check or cash into the offering box, you may wonder, what’s the difference? I’ve done both over the years. For me, the difference is: making a promise and working to keep it versus not making that promise and feeling less tied to the OMH community.

There’s a great energy created when we gather to worship in the church: we each feed it and we each draw from it, taking it with us to our homes, families, workplaces. Our financial energy committed to this place and this community in similar fashion spreads out and feeds ever-widening circles of communities. Your promises help it happen.

Cherie Staples, Assistant Treasurer

THE OLD MEETING HOUSE IS NOW ON FACE BOOK!

facebook.com/OldMeetingHouse

Inquirer's Gatherings

Have you ever wanted to know more about the OMH? The UCC? All those acronyms we use? Beginning this January, Elissa will be hosting a three-week series for those interested in knowing more about the church and what it means to be a member here. Please let Shirley know if you are interested in attending, by e-mailing admin@oldmeetinghouse.org!

Winter Solstice Celebration

At the annual grade school celebration of Orchard Valley Waldorf School, we will fill Montpelier High School's Smilie Auditorium with dance, song, drama, poetry, music, comedy and a few surprises. We all look forward to this showcasing of our school's performing arts programs including a special performance by our grade teachers. Bring your singing voices as there will be audience participation. Friends and families are most welcome! FREE. Thursday, Dec 22, 6:00 p.m. Montpelier High School auditorium, 5 High School Drive, Montpelier. For info, call 802-456-7400.

Junior High Confirmand and Mentor Holiday Extravaganza

When? Saturday, December 17 from 4:00 PM to 8:00 PM. Where? Parish House.

As a mission project for the fall/winter, the Confirmands have decided to participate in the Central Vermont Council on Aging Christmas Gift Giving Initiative. CVCA gives holiday gifts and meals to seniors in Washington, Lamoille and Orange counties who would otherwise spend Christmas alone.

On Saturday, December 17th, we will go shopping for, and wrap, gifts to be distributed. Of course Christmas Carols and Cookies will be involved!

This is a party for all the confirmands and the mentors (sorry parents, this notice is just for your calendars... :(). In addition, we will be inviting the Jr. High to join us for a portion of the evening - in order to make treats to share.. What a treat for us!!!

Confirmands



Food Donations

Food for the Onion River Food Shelf is being collected each Sunday, and is particularly necessary during this time of year. Please leave it in the basket in the narthex. Protein sources are especially welcome (peanut butter, beans, tuna, canned meats, beef stew). Thank you.

Meetings Schedule, Events & Announcements

Trustees—Tuesday, January 3, 7:00 p.m.

Christian Education Committee—Tuesday, January 3, 7:00 p.m.

Spiritual Life Committee—Monday, January 24, 7:00 p.m.

OMHAM— Wednesday, January 4, 6:00 p.m.

Executive Board—Tuesday, December 13, 7:00 p.m.

Missions Committee— Sunday, December 11, 11:00 a.m.

Confirmation Group—Sunday, December 17

Coffee Hour—Sundays after church service

Parish House Café—Wednesdays at noon

Choir Practice—Wednesdays at 7:00 p.m. and Sundays at 8:30 a.m.

Book Group —Thursday January 5th at 7:30 p.m. at the home of Scilla Gilbert

Stewardship 2012 Please remember to return your pledge cards and the Time and Talent Surveys. Both are essential for planning the new year.

Advent Devotionals If you are interested in observing the Season of Advent at home, Advent Booklets with activities, devotions and prayers are available in the entryway. Please also make sure to pick up paper to make peace prayer cranes, which you can bring back each week to decorate the tree.

Christmas Card Sale Send Christmas Cards? Like the Old Meeting House? As a fundraiser for the CV Council on Aging's Christmas Drive (for those who spend Christmas alone), the Confirmation class is selling cards of the Old Meeting House, painted by our very own Bud Hulbert. During coffee hour in December.

The **Circle of Care** committee reminds everyone that we are here for all of us: for new parents who may welcome help as they adjust to life with an infant, for seniors who can use assistance around the house, for someone who needs a ride to an appointment. Everyone needs help at different times. We would like you to feel free to call Cynthia Meigs at 476-8555 or anyone on the committee and let us know how we can help.

Advent Spiral Walking a labyrinth is one of the most ancient forms of prayer. This season during Advent, Fran Weinbaum will be creating our traditional Advent Spiral. It will be available to walk all the time, and lit after church on Sundays and Christmas Eve.

Christmas Day Service There will be no Nursery Care on Christmas morning. Children are invited to attend the full service.

Pageant Pageant Dress Rehearsal will be held on Saturday, December 17, 2011 – 9:30-11:30am. It is important that all pageant participants be here for this final rehearsal. If your child cannot make it, please contact the director or CEC. Performance - Sunday, December 18, 2011 – Children should report to the Parish House between 8:30 and 9:00am

On Going Events

Missing Album: A white notebook of photos of the construction of the Parish House is missing from our church scrapbooks, in the blue room. This white binder with a photo history of the Parish House construction has been missing for a year or more. If you know who might have borrowed it, please let Barbara Ploof know.

Now online! Copies of Elissa's most recent sermons are now online. Visit <http://www.oldmeetinghouse.org/Sermons.htm> to view.

Junior High Youth Group meets Sundays at the Parish House during the second half of church service.

Youth Choir (for children of all ages) practices in the Parish House during the first part of the church service and sings in church seasonally. Church Choir practices Sundays at 8:30 a.m.; Wed. at 7:00 p.m. beginning Sept. 7. Parish House Café serves lunch Wednesday at noon beginning Sept. 28.

Shoeboxes - In order to package the gifts for the CV Council on Aging Gift Initiative (which provides presents for seniors who otherwise would be alone on Christmas), the Confirmation class is in need of as many shoe-box size boxes as possible. If you have any available, please bring them to

Old Meeting House
1620 Center Road
Montpelier, VT 05602