

THE JOYBELL

of the

The Baptist Church of Grafton

An American Baptist Church

Rev. Dr. Frank Armstrong, Interim Pastor

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Message From Pastor Frank

In this copy of JOYBELL, as we look ahead to the New Year, I want to encourage some positive thinking; to explore the possibility that this coming New Year will be the best year any of us, as the Body of Christ, has ever had.

Now, I realize that for some of you this will sound like pie in the sky thinking. You are facing troubling times; life has not been easy for you; you're facing mountains - mountains you are not certain you can overcome. I would have to be living on another planet not to realize these realities.

However, notice, though, I am not saying that this will be the easiest year we have ever faced. Only that it can be the best year. Success cannot always be measured in either accomplishment or accumulation.

If the coming year brings us closer to God and closer to our family and friends, if it helps us value more highly the things that really matter and causes us to appreciate more deeply the gift of simply being alive, it will be a great year regardless of our other circumstances.

Of course, there is one thing I need to address that has particular relevance to this year. As some of you may know I came to Grafton as your Interim Pastor in September 2016. Between then and now, your search committee has been working diligently to find your next settled pastor with the hope that their choice will bring a freshness, vision, and hope that will Glorify God and keep our church alive and relevant to the times.

If you were to closely read Isaiah 60:1-22 you would see one of God's many encouragements that impact our own situation today as we seek a new leader.

With the blessing of God anointing his words, Isaiah counsels his people, "Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you." Sound familiar? We have just celebrated the birth and coming of that light. And the Glory of the Lord has risen upon us – regardless of how we may see our situation right now.

Many who heard Isaiah's summons surely responded, "What nonsense. How can I let my light shine? I've had a rough year. I'm old and feeble." Or, "I'm young, strong, and resourceful. Besides, I don't see any evidence of the deliverance of God."

Perhaps there is someone reading this who is of a like mind. You doubt that this can be a great year for you. You're too old for fantasies; too cynical for fairy tales of better days ahead. Like many in Isaiah's audience, you see no evidence of the deliverance of God or a change in your situation. Nevertheless, of Isaiah's primary tasks was to remind the people of God who they were. They were no ordinary run of the mill ragtag outfit. They were God's own anointed. They were the chosen. For a greater Glory that one could ever imagine

So now, as we look ahead to a New Year, we sometimes need to be reminded who we are, too. We are God's people. We are those for whom Christ died. We are God's family.

I just want to close with Jeremiah 29:11: "For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord; they are plans for good and not for disaster to give you a future of hope."

New Year Blessings,
Pastor Frank

A Note of Thanks

It is unbelievable to me that 2018 is almost here. Having just realized this, I need to write to all of you to once again extend my thanks and gratitude on behalf of myself and my family for your continued support, prayers and love extended to us as I continue my journey through renal disease. The good news, is that although my kidney function has decreased somewhat, the majority of my lab results continue to be relatively stable, and I don't require dialysis at this point in time. The other good news is that after a setback in the spring when I was rejected from one transplant program I was accepted by the program at Massachusetts General Hospital, and reached my goals for 2017 of not only being accepted into a program, but also being placed on the donor list, patiently awaiting my turn for a kidney transplant.

The one thing that I have learned throughout the challenges that have been presented to me throughout my life, and the struggles I have encountered, The Lord has a plan for me, which includes providing me with special people to provide me with the support, prayers and love that I need to see me through whatever comes my way.

My family and I are so grateful for our church family and your expressions of concern and prayers as we continue on this journey. We are looking forward to celebrating Christmas and to the new year. Our wish for each of you is that you have a blessed and joyous holiday season and that the new year brings good things to each and every one of you!

With warm holiday wishes,
Leta (On behalf of the DeLong-Stochaj family)

Pastoral Search Committee Update!

The Pastoral Search Committee has completed the Profile for our church. The Profile was assembled using guidelines provided by the American Baptist Churches. The objective of the Profile is twofold: First, to define our requirements for a full-time settled Pastor which ABC can use to conduct a nation-wide search of potential Pastoral candidates. And second, to provide critical information to these candidates about the Church, and the position, so they are able to understand our needs and make an informed decision about whether to pursue the Pastorship.

The Committee appreciates the participation of the Congregation over the course of the year in the process of completing the surveys and reflections which formed the basis of our Profile requirements. We are pleased to have reached this milestone - with your help - and look forward to continued progress securing a settled Pastor in 2018. Thank you, and Happy New Year!

Chris Hoffman, Chair

Annual Crèche Display

The first Sunday in December marks the town's Christmas celebration, "Grafton Celebrates the Holidays". For the eleventh year we participated by hosting an exhibit of Nativity Scenes owned by members and friends of our church.

This year, we had over 150 different sets on display in the sanctuary during the afternoon. For the fourth year a small church was donated that was raffled off to a lucky visitor. No money was collected – just phone numbers. This year's winner

was delighted to be chosen. Guests were also given an advent calendar as a thank-you for coming.

We were pleased to host the students of the Blackstone Valley String Quartet who played solos for their families and friends from noon until 1. The students ranged in age from 3 to teens. They added much joy to our sanctuary and to our display.

Downstairs, Marcia Kamilewicz chaired the refreshments for visitors, providing hot or cold drinks and cookies baked by church members. Kathy LaFlamme, Barbara LaFlamme and Alberta Monroe were our Boutique sales people for those who wished to shop.

There were a number of our church people who spent the entire day here, setting up, hosting and repackaging all of the crèches when the display ended. Recorded music from the Grotto added to the peaceful and joyous mood. There was a great crew who helped set up and then returned to re-pack and put everything away. This is a highly labor intensive project, and it could not have been done without all of this help. Many thanks to all who assisted.

Diaconate Report

The Diaconate has had a busy Christmas Season: greeters Yves Fleury, Barry Keith, Patti Reichle; the offertory and prayers by Meredith Christian, Donna Nichols; Christmas memories by Chris Hoffman; Music Ministry by Pat Knowlton, June Whitney; the poinsettias Patti Reichle, Ruth Ballantyne; and Diaconate gifting Ruth Ballantyne; past Chairs Robert Deans and family, Diane Libbey and family and Janice King lighting the Advent wreath candles; and call to worship,.

Crèche Sunday gave opportunity to local violin students to perform, some for the first time. Sylvia Di Crescentis, teacher, sent a thank you for the opportunity from all the string teachers to us. The students' families had an opportunity to hear them perform beyond their own living rooms, while at the same time, enjoying the magical crèche display being set up in the church.

The Deacons organized the Christmas Flowers for the Sanctuary this year. Plants were purchased for shut-ins and those who have been ill and others who could use a Christmas hug. Deacons and friends delivered the plants to all and wished them a Merry Christmas. For those of our shut-ins who cannot receive flowers, a card was send wishing them a Merry Christmas and a New Year. Also, cards were sent to our College students.

The Diaconate would like to ask that we remember and make time to contact or visit shut-ins or individuals who have recently lost a loved one or have an illness in the family. If there is someone who is unable to attend church and they would

like to receive communion, please contact the Church Office and a visit and communion can be scheduled. Sometimes we need to bring the solace of the church to the sick and the aged. Whether the member(s) are temporarily or chronically ill, have suffered a sudden accident or tragedy, or are confined in an institution or their own home, this contact has the unique privilege of renewing their spirits and bringing them good cheer by means of fellowship, prayer, the Scriptures, or words of friendship and comfort. It is a way of making sure members realize that the church cares about them.

The Diaconate is looking forward to 2018, and the great opportunities available to reach out to the local community, beyond the church steps to remind the local community that Christianity is very much alive and well at the Baptist Church of Grafton. I would like to invite the members and congregation, the people the Diaconate serve, the church, to offer ideas and suggestions for greater exposure to our neighbors.

Unity Prayer for our Search Team
John 17:3-5, 10

Jesus, Lord of all authority in heaven and on earth, We praise You for the life you gave to us so we may love and honor you. We thank the Creator daily, for the rise of the sun that you gave to us to separate the night from the day. Because of you, our Savior, we are able to know God, and he know us. We admit our transgressions to God the Father through you and pray that your Holy Spirit will live in us.

God, help us live each day emulating the character of Christ who gave his life so we might live in eternal peace and love with you, the Father. May we, the church of people, live as disciples in harmony with one another, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. May our strength in unity, and the strength of unity in prayer bring us a pastor worthy to preach Your Word to us, your loving servants.

Amen

Tom Hodgdon, Diaconate Chair

Christian Education Committee

Christian Education Committee did not meet in December. Chair Donna Nicholas helped to plan the Family Christmas Service on December 17. Four different people shared their memories of and the importance to them of Christmas – Carol Valentine, Patti Reichle, Christopher Hoffman and Michael Stochaj.

Advent Calendars were given out at the Creche exhibit and during coffee hours on the Sundays leading up to Christmas. Many people who are not part of our

church were pleased to be given a calendar as a thank you for visiting the exhibit.

The new Family Potluck lunch and service of carols and decoration was held on November 26. Several people attended the service, helped set up the window candles, brought in the Advent Wreath, put up the wreaths and the other decorations. There were hymns to sing and thoughts to share. It was a new tradition that stressed the importance of a family Christmas. The Christmas Tree in the front of the sanctuary looks lovely with its decorations of lights and warm items to be donated to the Grafton Food Bank. The Committee thanks all who brought items to share and to the children who “artfully” decorated the tree.

The Advent Candles have been lit each Sunday in Advent by a different family. The candles and wall banners remind us of the approach of Christmas, the waiting and the watching. Again this is part of the family Christmas theme that we are celebrating this year.

Annual RMMO Offering

We begin the New Year by participating in the first of our five annual special offerings. The Retired Ministers and Missionaries Offering is used to address the emergency needs of the more than 3,300 retired ministers, missionaries and their families. Among those needs are medical and housing costs. Several of our former pastors and their spouses are among those who have been assisted by this offering. Please consider making a donation in their honor. RMMO envelopes are available in the pew racks throughout January.

Giving Envelopes for 2018

The **2018 Envelopes** are available just inside the front door of the church. You should receive a box of envelopes if you have returned your pledge form or are a regular giver. Your name appears on the top of the box. Envelopes are available at any time – just contact Chris Hoffman at 508-498-3887 or speak to any Finance Committee member.

Property Update

Property Committee met on December 14. A letter was read from Steve Reichle who due to family and work commitments has resigned from the Committee.

The following items were discussed:

- Energy audit has been done on the Church building. Barry is still waiting for the final report. He will follow up with this for the January meeting
- Parsonage update

- Frosts are planning to be out of the Parsonage by March 1
- A variety of plumbing issues have been corrected by Richie Adams, a local plumber
- Fire escape door was blown open on a very cold and windy day. Deacons will be reminded to check the doors each Sunday to prevent this from happening again.
- Outside door to Russell Hall closes with issues. People need to be sure it is closed when they leave the building. It needs an extra tug to latch.
- Barry has purchased and installed reflective tape on the steps in the two choir lofts to prevent tripping.
- Thanks to Steven Reichle who lowered all the storm windows in the sanctuary and also the ones in Russell Fellowship Hall. This will help to keep both areas warmer during the winter.
- John Renaud is working with Sunshine Sign Company to get a sign for the front of the church which lists Pastor Frank as the Interim Minister. Has had issues getting it done as it is a small job that does not get priority.
- There is a growing list of things that need to be done at the Parsonage to get it ready for a new Pastor. John Renaud is working with contractors to get estimates.

Church Secretary Janice King Retires; New Office Hours

Friday, December 29 was Janice King's last day as our Church Secretary. She has filled this position for the past 9 years, most recently working two days a week. She has been a constant, a loving and caring person at the other end of the phone, the person who knows where everything is and what needs to be done to keep us on track. We will miss her face in the office but know that the Fair, the Creche Exhibit, Deacons duties and other such tasks will keep her busy at Church.

Starting this month, Donna Nichols will expand her Secretary's role from three days a week to four. She will be working Monday through Thursday mornings each week. The Church office will not be open Friday mornings.

Important Business Meeting SUNDAY, JANUARY 7

On Sunday, January 7 directly after our Worship Service there will be a short informational meeting dealing with the future of our parsonage. There are many issues that should be addressed before a settled pastor and family could move in which will need the understanding of the congregation before we move forward. Please plan to stay, hear the presentation and prayerfully consider how we should approach these issues.

2018 Public Dinners Underway!

Our first public dinner of the New Year will be held on Saturday, January 20. We'll be serving **Shepherd's Pie**. The dinner will be served at 5:30 PM. While not required, reservations are appreciated by your kitchen crew. Please use the sign-up sheet in Russell Hall or call the church office (508-839-4911) to sign up.

Our sterling kitchen crew is looking for your assistance. Helpers are needed to set up and to clean-up after the dinners. If you can help, please remember to sign up in Russell Hall. Also please bring your contributions for our world famous dessert table!

Annual Meeting SUNDAY, JANUARY 21

Please submit all committee and board reports to the church office on a disk or thumb drive or email them to officebcg1800@gmail.com on or before January 7.

This will allow the **Annual Report booklets** to be ready for **Sunday, January 14**. This will allow time for the congregation to read the Report in preparation for the Annual Meeting.

Church family members are invited to participate in a pot luck luncheon directly after church on January 21. Paper plates, plastic silverware and cups will be provided by the Church along with coffee, tea and punch. Please bring a dish to share with friends, your copy of the annual report and any questions you may have about our church's finances.

The **2018 Annual Meeting will follow the luncheon**. At this time members will hear the reports of various church boards and a report from the finance committee on church finances, and will be asked to vote on a slate of officers and committee chairs as well as the budget for the upcoming year. **Each and every person's participation is important.** Please plan to attend our Annual Meeting – it's your opportunity to ask questions, offer ideas and actively participate in directing our church's future.

In case of inclement weather, this meeting will be moved to **Sunday, January 28**.

Important Dates for January

1	Monday	~	New Year's Day. Have a Happy, Healthy New Year!
2	Tuesday	~	5:15-6:15pm AA Reflections Group
		~	7:30pm Bible Study with Meredith Christian
4	Thursday	~	9:30am Prayer Time in the parlor
7	Sunday	~	10:00am Worship Service to God's Glory, Sunday

			School classes for our youth. Informational Business Meeting, Coffee Fellowship following meeting.
		~	11:30am Choir Rehearsal with Pat Knowlton
8	Monday	~	Mission Committee with Garfield Atchue
		~	7:00 Long Range Planning with Meredith Christian
9	Tuesday	~	5:15-6:15pm AA Reflections Group
11	Thursday	~	9:30am Prayer Time in the parlor
		~	7:00pm Property Committee with Barry Keith
13	Saturday	~	Quilt Class with Paula Moore
14	Sunday	~	10:00am Worship Service to God's Glory, Sunday School classes for our children and youth. Coffee Fellowship following Worship.
		~	11:30am Choir Rehearsal with Pat Knowlton
15	Monday	~	7:00pm Board of Directors with Bert Engvall
16	Tuesday	~	5:15-6:15pm AA Reflections Group
		~	7:30pm Bible Study with Meredith Christian
17	Wednesday	~	3:00pm Crescent Manor
18	Thursday	~	9:30am Prayer Time in the parlor
20	Saturday	~	5:50 Shepherd's Pie Dinner
21	Sunday	~	10:00am Worship Service to God's Glory, Sunday School classes for our children and youth. Undie Sunday
		~	Pot luck lunch and Annual Meeting following worship
22	Monday	~	7:00 Deacons Meeting
23	Tuesday	~	5:15-6:15pm AA Reflections Group
		~	7:00 Christian Education with Donna Nichols
25	Thursday	~	9:30am Prayer Time in the parlor
28	Sunday	~	10:00am Worship Service to God's Glory, Sunday School classes for our children. Coffee Fellowship following Worship. Annual meeting snow date

- **Worship Service to God's Glory, 10:00am**, with Childcare and Sunday School Classes for children in Nursery through High School. Church Family Fellowship Time with refreshments following the Worship Service.
- **Deacons of the Month for January:** Meredith Christian and June Whitney
- **Tellers for the Month of December** Diane Libbey and Christopher Hoffman
- **Church Office Hours** are Monday – Thursday 9:00 am–11:30 am.
- Call the Church office for the Pastor's hours.

2018 Stewardship Campaign - Please read carefully!

The Stewardship theme is, "Look to the future". The future of our church depends, in part, on attracting an energetic, highly qualified pastor. To attract such a pastor requires

financial support of that pastor. So, please don't just pledge what you gave in 2017. Give careful consideration to the future of this church, and pledge an amount that will help contribute towards a bright future.

Here is what is needed to ensure that the mission of this church continues to be strong and effective next year and into the future:

- **Operating Expenses**
 - *Total anticipated Operating Expenses for 2018: About \$110,000*
 - *This is about \$2,100 needed each week to keep the church's doors open.*
 - *Pledge Goal: \$64,000:* Pledging is the greatest source of income (58%) towards Operating Expenses.
 - *This pledging area needs the greatest support.*
- **Planned Missions:**
 - *Pledge Goal:* \$3,000
 - Planned Missions raises contributions so our church can support local, regional, national and international missions giving throughout the year.
- **Building Fund:**
 - *Pledge Goal:* \$2,000
 - The Building Fund accumulates money to help pay for repairs and upgrades to the church and parsonage.
- **Savings Fund:**
 - *Pledge Goal:* \$2,000
 - The Savings Fund replaces monies from the church's Endowment funds that have been used to pay for major projects such as the church roof that was installed in 2003.
 - The Savings Fund is used to "pay ourselves back" for the money we borrowed from ourselves to finance these major projects.

If you have never pledged before, it is easy! Here's some basic info about pledging:

- A pledge is what a person intends to give to the church during the year.
- Pledges make budget planning easier.
- A person is free to designate which area(s) s/he wants to make a pledge to.
- A pledge is *not* a legally-binding contract.
- Pledge amounts and designations can be changed during the year if a person's/family's financial situation changes.
- Pledge amounts are held in the strictest confidence by the Finance Committee.
- Questions? Contact any member of the Finance Committee: Bert Engvall, Chris Hoffman, David Libbey, or Cyndy Engvall.

I have faith that the members and friends of this church realize how blessed our church is, and are willing to continue to support it to the best of their abilities in order to ensure that its future will continue to be bright. *I trust that every giver supports this church because s/he strongly believes in the importance of its ministry, and, wherever possible, will try to increase her or his support of it. Continuation of this ministry depends on all of us working together to meet next year's financial needs.*

For convenience, a pledge form is included in this issue of the “Joybell” for those who would like to make a pledge for this year and have not yet done so. It is our goal to complete the Stewardship Campaign by Christmas, so it will be helpful for you to hand in a pledge form soon.

The Finance Committee treats all pledges confidentially.

**Baptist Church of Grafton
Planned Giving for 2018**

During 2018 I/We plan to give the following amounts:

Fund	Amount	How Often (please circle)
Operating Expenses		per week per month one time amount
Planned Missions		per week per month one time amount
Building Fund		per week per month one time amount
Savings Fund		per week per month one time amount

I understand that this Planned Giving is an indication of my intention to make this contribution to The Baptist Church of Grafton, and that this is *not* a legally binding contract.

Name (Please print): _____

To return this form:

Please fold, then staple or tape this form closed. Bring it to church and put it in the offering plate. **Or hand it** to Bert Engvall, Chris Hoffman, David Libbey, or Cyndy Engvall. If you choose to put it in the offering plate, the offering counters will *not* open your form. It will be placed, unopened, in the Finance Committee mailbox at church.

Or mail to: Baptist Church of Grafton, PO Box 304, Grafton, MA 01519 Attn: Pledge

Crazy Quilters of our Church give back to Community

The Crazy Quilters meet at our church almost monthly. It is a group of sewers who enjoy the fellowship, learning and laughter of working together on projects. This year the group again worked to create bags for Abby’s House in Worcester. Led by Joanne St. Germain the group created 38 bags and filled them with per-

sonal supplies, candy, gloves, socks, paper and pens. These were delivered in time for Christmas, much to the appreciation of the clients and staff of Abby's.