

Keeping In Touch

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE SECOND CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF STAFFORD

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A(nother) Sermon About Love

Rev. Cindy Maddox

John 13:31-35

I write my sermons in Google docs, and when they're in progress, I don't like seeing, there in the left hand corner, "Untitled document." I never know what I'm going to end up calling it, so it's often a working title. This week I just typed in "A Sermon About Love." I looked at that and thought, "Well, that really narrows it down!" So then I added a set of parentheses and "nother," so that the title is A(nother) Sermon About Love. So I figured it was appropriate to start with excerpts from a poem by one of my favorite poets, Andrea Gibson, with "A List of Things I Love."

I love. That could be the end of the sentence, but I love sentences.

I love words huddled together like strangers trying to survive a frigid night.

I love rock sculptures built in windstorms.

I love sandcastles crafted inches from the waves.

I love the drama of an 80's ballad.

I love penguins, though I've never met one.

I love how shocked I was when I realized my Superman cape couldn't lift me into the sky.

I love that all these decades later, I can still be that exact same kind of surprised.

I love the perfect smiles of people with crooked teeth.

I love how my partner takes karaoke far too seriously.

I love my very first crush in the 4th grade, wherever he is, whoever he became.

I love that pigeons can recognize themselves in photographs.

I love that laughter is more contagious than the flu.

I love thank-you letters mailed to teachers twenty years after graduation.

I love the romance of merge signs.

I love watching people pull over on the side of the road to take pictures of a rainbow.

I love that I can fix almost anything with shoelaces or duct tape.

I love listening to my partner yell, "Andrea! Where did my shoelaces go this time!?"

I love pointing out the window at our singing wind chime.

I love listening for the quietest notes of the loudest songs.

I love the kind kids who have hard lives.

I love the mean kids who haven't yet learned a better way to survive.

I love that after chemotherapy, my straight hair grew back in curls.

I love trying to jump over puddles and failing.

I love that cows have best friends.

I love that fleeting moment of annoyance while deep in writing a poem, someone interrupts to ask me to come look at the sunset.

I love the instant that follows, when I recognize that to be a true poet, I must abandon every poem for every pink sky.

I love the pink sky and the sound of my grumpy neighbor opening his door at the same time that I do.

I love both of us peeling off the husks of our minds to taste the sweetness of the world's truth.

I love what I have in common with people I have nothing in common with.

I love how much longer this list would be if the sunset were not, in this very second, calling me.

Part of me was tempted to pass out pens this morning and have you write your own sermon by simply making a list of things you love . . . not people, and not the usual things, but the things that typically go unnoticed or unnamed. I would love to read those poems because I think they would tell me so much about you. We are defined by who we love and what we love. And we are defined by who or what we hate. I don't want to write that poem, and I don't want to ask you to write that poem, even though it might be easier.

I read a story this week written by a man about spending days at his dying mother's bedside. "I hate. I hate. I hate," my mom chanted unconsciously on her deathbed. "It's going to be okay. Everything is going to be okay," I lied softly to her while holding her cold balled up fist in my hand. With her eyes pinched shut she responded with another round of "I hate. I hate. I hate."

It had been five days since she had said anything other than "I hate" and it was breaking my heart. The "I hates" always came in threes. I spent hours by her bedside trying to figure out why. . . . The endless stream of socially awkward neurologists made it known to us that whatever my mom was saying was probably just her brain misfiring due to the trauma of the collecting pressure of blood that was building on it. "I hate. I hate. I hate." I didn't want those to be the last words that she would utter before the unstoppable bleeding in her brain would finally claim her life. I was desperate for her to say anything else. "It is going to be okay. You are loved. You are loooooovveed. Loooved," I said like a parent trying to get their baby to say their first word.

Although I am prone to abject selfishness and can easily make most things about me — I was pretty sure that her litany of I hates didn't have much to do with me. If I had to guess, I'm pretty sure she was just commenting on how much she hated her current situation. My mom abhorred doctors and people doting over her — and she was immersed in both of those terrible situations in that moment. I remember trying to hold her hand, but it was always clenched too tight — so I settled for just resting mine on top of hers while watching her fade away. I sat by her for another three days in that horrible hospital room witnessing my mom grapple with death. . . . Eventually she was moved to a much more comfortable hospice center for her last couple of days on Earth. There were no more mechanical whirls or beeps from monitors that plagued our days together in the old hospital room. At hospice there was only the sound of quiet dignity of my mom's final few thousand breaths. But there was one familiar sound that followed us to hospice: "I hate. I hate. I hate," she continued. "It's going to be okay," I responded on cue, my hand on her fist. A young hospice nurse walked in and took a look at the two of us. "Hold her hand," she instructed kindly but firmly.

I tried explaining to her that my mom wasn't going to allow for that. Her hand was too tightly coiled. The nurse shook her head like a fastball pitcher who was just given the sign to throw a change up. She walked over and took my mom's fisted hand, gently turned it over and began to tenderly massage the base of her palm. Within a second or two her fist opened up like a spring flower. I immediately laced my fingers with hers. This was the first time we had held hands in 25 years. Everything melted away. The room. The lovely hospice nurse. It was just me and my mom. A mother and her son having one last walk together through the universe. Two souls parting.

When I regained my senses I saw the nurse on the other side of my mom's bed holding her opposite hand. She smiled at me. "It's hard to hold hands with a fist," she said in the softest of voices. I nodded in consent. I was crying. It was the first time that I had broken down during my mom's six week battle. "It's going to be okay. You are loved," I whispered to my mom. "Okay..." she whispered in reply.

She never spoke again. A day later my mom passed away surrounded by family and with her hands being held. She ventured across the veil feeling a pulse beat against her still body. "Okay" was her last word. She went from "I hate" to "okay" because her hand was held tenderly and she was reminded that she was loved.

Our Gospel reading from John also speaks tenderly of love, also in saying goodbye. The chapter features Jesus gathering with his disciples for their final time together. The first verse of this chapter reads, "Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." He then demonstrated his love by kneeling before them and washing their feet. Jesus turned to the disciples and addressed them with deep tenderness: "Little children, I am with you only a little longer." (v. 33) That phrase, little children, is a term of affection. It's the only time Jesus is reported as using this exact phrase in the Gospels. It's intimate. Parental. Pastoral. The time of his physical presence with them was drawing to a close, and he was preparing them for his departure.

And then comes verse 34: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have

loved you, you also are to love one another.” This is the heart of the passage. But why is it a new commandment? It’s not that love was never commanded before. Other religions teach love. Torah teaches love for neighbor and stranger, alike. One scholar writes, “What is new is the way Jesus interpreted and practiced that love, namely, through service, it means serving one another, even in the most menial tasks. on the other hand, this love encompasses heroic acts of great risk; it extends even to the point of giving one’s life for another. The love of which Jesus speaks, then, and which Jesus demonstrates in his life and death, is a love which extends from the mundane to the heroic and encompasses every kind of self-giving act in between.” Jesus raises the bar—to love as he has loved us. Foot-washing love. Cross-bearing love. Love that kneels. Love that bleeds. This is not sentimental affection; it is covenantal devotion. It is the kind of love that redefines community—but as a people shaped by the self-giving love of Christ. We need this kind of love: Not the soft and selective love of sentiment, but the self-giving, inconvenient, resilient kind. A love that washes feet. A love that opens fists. A love that walks with someone through pain, not away from it. A love that keeps saying “You are loved” even when all we hear in return is “I hate.”

So, yes—it’s another sermon about love, but maybe we’ve never needed another sermon more . . . Because in a world where fists are clenched in pain and power, in a world where too many are dying unheard and unseen, Jesus still commands us to love— not with safe affection, but with courageous compassion. To love as he loved is about standing with the hurting, advocating for the oppressed, risking comfort for the sake of justice. This love is not neutral. It takes sides—not against people, but always with the suffering. So if we are to love one another as Jesus loved us, then we must love those whose cries for safety and dignity echo across a weary world. We must love refugees, the imprisoned, the wounded, and all who walk under skies filled with drones instead of doves. To love as Jesus loved is to say: Your life matters. Your story matters. Your suffering is not invisible. It is to hold a trembling hand, to open our own clenched fists, and to say with our actions, “You are loved. And I will not look away.”

May we be known not by our silence in the face of injustice, but by the love that compels us to speak. Not by sentiment, but by solidarity. Not by comfort, but by compassion that shows up, that stays, that dares to love like Christ.

Amen.

T R E A S U R E R ’ S R E P O R T

Category	Year-To-Date	Budget-To-Date	Percentage
R21—Freewill	\$ 1,302.00	\$ 1,333.33	98%
R22—Pledges	\$ 6,752.00	\$ 6,333.33	107%
R23—Contributions	\$ 1,620.00	\$ 2,333.33	69%
R24—Fund Raising	\$ 805.23	\$ 3,333.33	24%
Capital Campaign	\$ 760.00	\$ 1,000.00	76%

Thru April 30.

C H U R C H C O U N C I L

Council was moved from Sunday May 18th to Tuesday June 10th at 6 pm. This will be the last time we meet until September, so I hope to see the heads of each position and invite any members of roles that haven't been to a council meeting. We have a lot to talk about our break. Thanks!

Andrew Greaves Church Moderator

TRUSTEES

We have approved our church custodian to make \$140.00 monthly, rather than the \$125.00 they were being paid prior. This decision was made since the rate has not raised since 2003 and we believe it was overdue. Tom and I cut down two small trees at the bottom of the parking lot that were dying. They were a sugar maple and a white mountain ash. Tom also cleaned up some debris around the barn. Thanks Tom! Lisa donated the final two weigelas and planted them. The garden project is coming to completion and looks great.

We received quotes last year and this year for sealcoating our upper parking lot. We decided to use Rose Paving, LLC. Last year's quote was 220 LF of crack seal for \$1250.00 and 9770 SF of two coats of sealcoating for a total of \$3729.41. This year's quote was 518 LF of crack seal for \$1375.00 and 10230 SF of two coats of sealcoating for \$2750.00 for a total of \$4125.00. We thought it was a great offer for having close to 300 extra LF of cracking in our lot and the addition of 460 SF of sealcoating to do the small parking spot that is our neighbors for an extra \$395.59. Our neighbor will reimburse us or do some projects for us for doing this for him. We decided to do this as well, so everything matches. A date to do this work has not been set yet.

Respectfully submitted,
Andrew Greaves Board of Trustees Chair

IN AND AROUND THE CHURCH ...

Our Hearts and Prayers reach out to our Brothers and Sisters who have various needs and struggles: prayers for my students in Enfield that they are safe, healthy and happy ... continued prayers for Donna, Sarah, Lucy and Andy ... prayers for continued growth for our church family ... prayers for more love and peace in our community, country and world ... prayers for Mrs. Miclosky on her upcoming childbirth ... prayers for Kathy and her family ... prayers for my sister Angela battling cancer ... prayers for happiness and healing for my family ... continued prayers for Bertrand and Claire ... prayers for Peter ... prayers for unity ... prayers for the Pastoral Search Committee and we start our journey ... prayers for better health ... prayers for those battling cancer ... prayers for Gabe's back feeling better ... prayers for Tracy on the loss of her mother ... prayers for Evie and Shirley ... prayers for the Yong family on the loss of their mother ... prayers for the Volz family on the loss of their mother ... prayers for all who struggle with mental illness and addictions ... prayers for my father Tom and for my brother who has liver cancer ... prayers for my six children and their mother who has taught them so much ... prayers for peace on earth for all that have been affected by the weather—may they rebuild their homes and lives ... prayers for any of our flea market vendors going through health issues ... prayers for Stephanie on the loss of her mother ... prayers for Kirstin and Calvin and their unborn daughter ... may God bless the future chaplains, ministers and interfaith leaders that have graduated from HIU ... blessings for safe travel for Uncle Bob at 80 years old ... prayers of peace for Florence ... prayers for our friends who died recently in Great Barrington ... prayers for Ed Parker as he under goes medical tests and treatment ... prayers for my mother-in-law and everyone who works in her department as they struggle with the stress and change in their work systems ... prayers for Yvonne and Maury.

Celebrations: Ben celebrating his 16th birthday ... granddaughter Caitlin graduation with Doctorate in Occupational Therapy ... Sarah receives her cooperative ministry certificate from HIU ... Happy Mothers Day ... we celebrate this hard working congregation ... happy anniversary for Sarah and Andrew ... congratulations to Shannon for her BS on Education from Central CT ... prayer of thanks to all veterans.

A LIGHTER MOMENT. . .

A pastor is walking down the street one day when he notices a small boy trying to use the doorbell on a house across the street. However, the boy is very small and the doorbell is too high for him to reach. After watching the boy's efforts for some time the pastor walks across the street up to the little fellow and rings the doorbell.

Kneeling down next to the child, the pastor smiles and asks, "And now what, my little man?" To which the boy replies, "Run!"

* * * *

A Sunday school teacher was teaching the Ten Commandments to her five and six year olds. After explaining the commandment to "honor thy father and thy mother," she asked, "Is there a commandment that teaches us how to treat our brothers and sisters?"

One little boy shouted, "Thou shall not kill."

* * * *

A fellow went to the doctor who told him that he had a bad illness and only a year to live. So he decided to talk to his pastor. After the man explained his situation, he asked his Pastor if there was anything he could do.

"What you should do is go out and buy a late '70 or early '80 model Dodge Pickup," said the Pastor. "Then go get married to the meanest, ugliest woman you can find, and buy yourselves an old house trailer in the panhandle of Oklahoma."

The fellow asked, "Will this help me live longer?"

"No," said the pastor, "but it will make what time you do have seem like forever."

MISSIONS

We were able to deliver two large grocery bags of non-perishable food items. One bag was brought to Crystal Lake Food Pantry, and the other was taken to Safenet. The Crystal Lake Food Pantry posted a picture of our monthly donation to them on their public Facebook page, tagging the church, expressing their appreciation.

Someone donated a large amount of hypoallergenic infant formula to the Little Shop. I called Social Services in town to see if they could use it, and the First Selectman Bill Morrison called me right back, and met up with me at the town hall that morning to collect it. He promised to make sure it went to our neighbors in need.

We also had another generous donation of 50.00 to our local missions, leaving a total of 150.00 in which we have for any special needs/local mission that should arise. We welcome any suggestions from fellow Church members if they should hear of any local drives or needs.

Respectfully submitted ,
Michele Sedor, Committee Chair

BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES

June Birthdays

1	Raymond Bourque
6	Peg Ekenbarger
10	John DelBene
17	Teresa Raymond
25	Kim Dickson
26	Rosalie Starvish

June Anniversaries

5	Kathy Ladr
10	Kenneth and Linda May
21	John and Judy DelBene
22	Vi Irish
29	Florence Demars

LIGHTING OF THE CROSS

In loving memory of **Barbara Kellem** by Roy

In memory of **Frances Barton** from Millie

In loving memory of our parents, **Roger & Lucy Hatch** by RuthAnne and Michael Talamini

CHRISTIAN ED / SUNDAY SCHOOL

Children's Sunday will be Sunday June 22nd. That is our final week of Sunday School until Rally Day in September. We will do a quick presentation and take photos before heading down to Sunday School in place of a children's sermon. Following the service, we will have a potluck as a congregation to celebrate the end of the school year and play games outside if weather is good. Otherwise, we will have it in Fellowship Hall.

DUCK RACE

Its that time of year! The duck race will be Saturday, July 12, 2025. There will be games and lunch from 12 – 1 with the race starting at 1 PM.

Sign up sheets will be downstairs. As with all of our fundraisers your help is needed to make this successful. There are things of all interests to do!!

We will also have a bake sale that day. Please bake your favorite cookies and package 3 to a snack baggie (per board of health).

Raffle prizes are most important. If you would care to donate a raffle prize, please sign up and bring them in as soon as possible. Linda always liked duck themed fun prizes (although any prize is welcome!) and they went over very well. If you will be adding a gift card to your prize, please make them \$15 - \$25 cards.

Lunch will be served, games will be provided for the children and there will be some duck souvenirs for sale. Linda has made this a highly successful fund raiser over the years and in her memory – I'd like to see it succeed. Your help is greatly appreciated!

If you have any questions or ideas, please give me a call at 413-374-3247. Leave a message if you don't reach me and I will call you back.

Thank you!

Kim Dickson – Event Coordinator

PULPIT SUPPLY

June 1st: Sarah Roman Greaves (MID)

June 8th: Rev Craig Cowing

June 15th: Rev Craig Cowing

June 22nd: Rev Craig Cowing

June 29th: Rev Joe Tobin

July 6th: Rev Rob Donaldson

July 13th: Rev Rob Donaldson

July 20th: Rev Joe Tobin

July 27th: Rev Rob Donaldson

FLEA MARKET RECAP

Thank you so much to everyone who made the Flea Market happen!! We ran into some issues but learned together how to make everything smoother next time. I look forward to meeting and talking about ways to add to this events success and taking our vendors ideas and criticisms. Even after cancellations and iffy weather we made \$936.60, a number we can be very proud of. I also want to congratulate the Little Shop for breaking a two-day Flea Market record by making \$354.00. It always amazes me how much this small congregation does, and I can't thank everyone enough again. I look forward to working with all of you in September for our next Flea Market.

Andrew

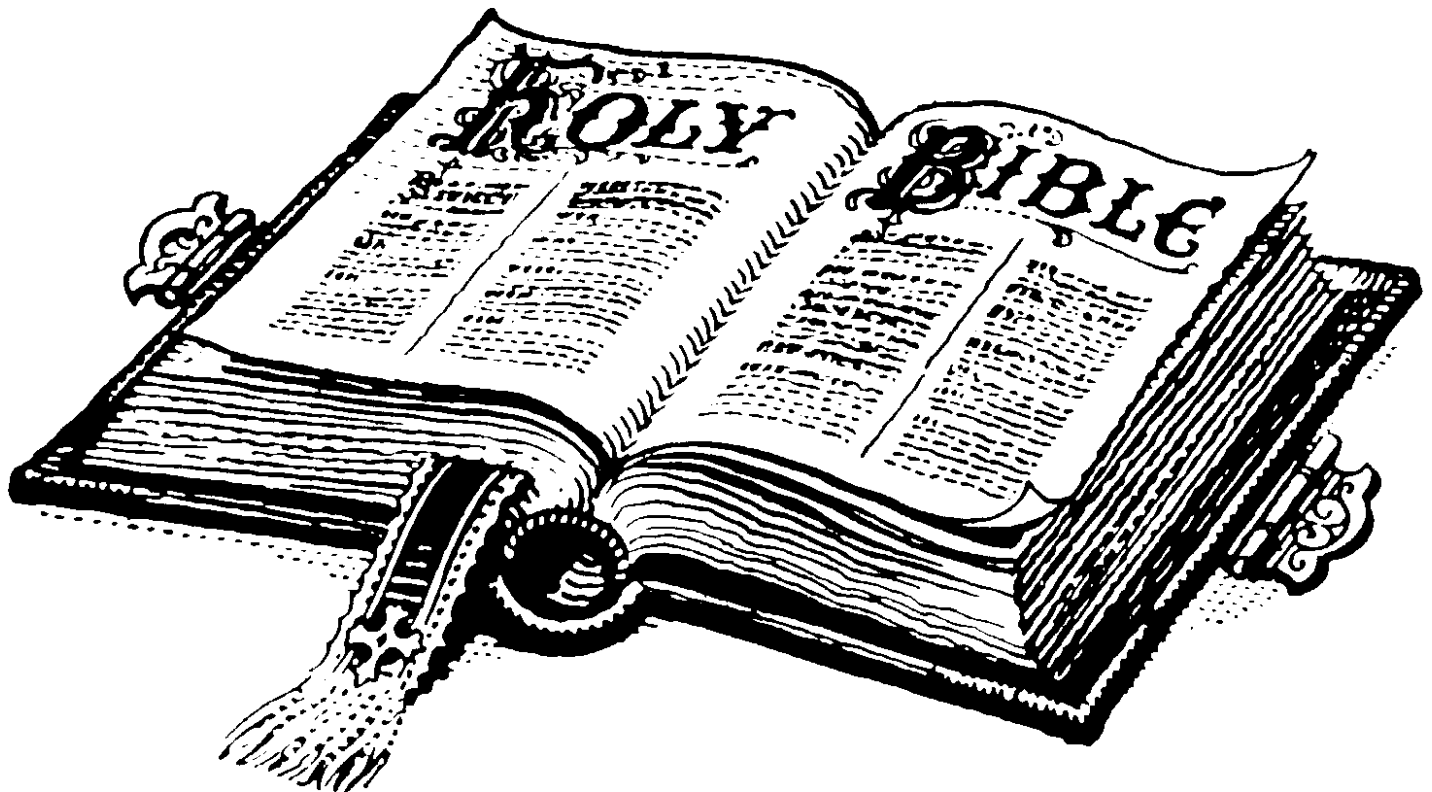
REST STOP FUNDRAISER

We have decided to do the Rest Stop this June. The dates set are setting up Thursday June 26th at the Church at 4:30 pm to fill the trailer and then bring the trailer to the Rest Stop location at 5 pm to set up the tent. We will work 8:30 to 4 pm on Friday June 27th, and Saturday June 28th. We won't be doing Sunday this time around and its unknown right now as to when clean-up will be. Please monitor the sign-up sheets and thank you everyone for signing up for this wonderful fundraiser!!

PASTORAL SEARCH COMMITTEE

The Pastoral Search Committee of 7 church members got together with me the Moderator to put together a profile for our pastoral search. We took the old profile and made changes based on that, and it has been submitted to our area conference minister and the head of the search and call process. We are waiting on approval or if we need to make any changes. After it is accepted, we wait for pastors to reach out to be interviewed. Until then we will continue with supply pastors. Thank you!!

Andrew Greaves, Church Moderator



June 2025

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 Worship Service 9:30 AM	2	3	4	5	6	7 Little Shop - 10 - 2
8 Worship Service 9:30 AM	9	10	11	12	13	14 Little Shop - 10 - 2
15 Worship Service 9:30 AM Food Bank Sunday	16	17	18	19	20	21 Little Shop - 10 - 2
22 - Brookside Service Worship Service 9:30 AM	23	24	25	26	27	28 Little Shop - 10 - 2
29 Worship Service 9:30 AM	30					