

Pastor's Report for Annual Meeting January 28, 2024

One of my favorite scriptures is Philippians 4:13: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." When things are difficult, I remember this, take a deep breath, and move forward knowing that God is with me. There were times we all had to do that this year as flood waters invaded our community and many people's homes and as we said goodbye to beloved members: Bernie Stolp, Anne Matulonis, Susan Kneebone, Jeff Lienhard, and Janet Pace. As we celebrated these lives and came together to help those suffering from the affects of the floods, we truly showed that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

We also showed we can move forward as the Building Inclusivity Team realized that before we can look towards an Open and Affirming vote in our church, we need to have a mission and vision. Five members attended a Church Vitality Conference in March and from that we hosted a Conversation Church and other meetings that led to the proposed Mission and Vision statements that we will vote on today. From that also came the idea that we could film our services, which are now available on Okemo Valley Television's website.

We studied together during a Lenten Bible Study and two workshops looking at the children's book *God's Holy Darkness* by Sharei Green and Beckah Selnick, considering the harm negative images of darkness can have on people of color and focusing on the holiness of darkness as presented in many places in the Bible. We revisited this idea during the Martin Luther King, Jr. Service on January 14th.

We worshiped in new ways having Wild Church and a picnic at Carl and Nancy Hagge's (worshiping God's creation while immersed in it) and having a Holy Hilarity Sunday knowing that laughter is indeed good medicine.

We enjoyed fellowship together in coffee hours, a lunch with President Coolidge, a piano concert with Professor David Feurzeig and his "Play Every Town Initiative", Christmas Caroling and a soup supper.

We served our community by distributing flood buckets, volunteering, and allowing the use of our building for the Rotary Club, the Alzhemier's Memory Cafe, Black River Good Neighbors and the Ludlow Women's Club.

We are striving to live Jesus Christ's message of inclusive love in our community and world and must continue to look for new ways to: welcome everyone, celebrate diversity, nurture spiritual growth, work toward peace and justice and serve our community and world. I look forward to the new ways we find to do this in 2024.

With a grateful heart,

Pastor Michelle