



The Old Meeting House
1620 Center Road
Montpelier, VT 05602
(802) 229-9593
www.oldmeetinghouse.org

Advent/Christmas 2008 Newsletter

Letter from Susan Cooke Kittredge, Pastor

November/December 2008

Dear Friends,

As I begin this letter, I can't help but think of Judy Blume's book *Are You There, God? It's me Margaret*. Are you there, dear friends? It's me Susan. I am so looking forward to returning to the OMH for the wonderful seasons of Advent and Christmas; I can't wait to see you all.

As you know, a large part of my sabbatical has been spent settling into our new home in Shelburne. Having lived in the same house for 31 years and raised 5 children there, you can imagine the detritus we collected; much of it did not make the move.

Somewhere around the beginning of October things seemed to calm down and the last boxes were recycled. Being by the lake during the fall migration of birds has been extraordinary. Between painting and unpacking and trying to find a place for everything, I have had an interesting time with God. I am very grateful to all of you for giving me the opportunity to be so very much on the receiving end. Which is not to say that once I stopped yakking God just spoke volumes to me. Far from it, there were a lot more Margaret moments than I would have expected--or wanted. Are you there, God? It's me, Susan. This in itself has been enormously informing; I

Preaching Schedule

Nov. 23 – David
Stewardship Sunday

Nov. 30 – Susan

Dec. 7 – David

Dec. 14 – Susan

Dec. 21 – Children's
Christmas Pageant

Wednesday, Dec. 24 –
5:00pm – Children's
Candlelight Service

7:00 pm – Traditional
Candlelight Service

9:00 pm – Candlelight
Service of Readings
and Carols

Dec. 28 – Susan

Jan. 4 – Susan's Last
Sunday

have had to listen, to wait, to wonder, to be patient, to live in faith.

So in the coming seasons of giving thanks and then turning to Advent, that time that requires Olympic waiting, I thank you for these past months of learning and prayer.

There is another letter that I felt the need to write. Since I doubt it would get opened any place else, I think I'll just share it to you. I realize it tiptoes towards the edge of politics and religion, but you know me well and none of this will be a surprise.

Bless you all,

Susan

November 8, 2008

The Honorable Barack Obama, President- Elect

United States Senate

713 Hart Senate Office Building

Washington, DC 20510-1305

Dear Mr. President-Elect,

On November 5 many people around me complained that their cheeks hurt because they couldn't stop smiling. I couldn't stop crying. After a few hours I did step back and wonder why this mighty flood. I realized that I had been girding my loins and holding myself together for way too long. The relief and tears I felt on your election showed me something I had not been entirely willing to face: my own fear and resigned sense of ineffectualness. Suddenly that was gone and I felt I could breathe again, that this country, and maybe even the world, could breathe again.

And herein lies the danger because we are, in fact, going to be disappointed. This is what I want to say to you: I forgive you. I can't speak for anyone else but I suspect there may be millions of Americans who would like to say the same thing.

We forgive you for the mistakes you are bound to make, for the errors in judgment, the slips of tongue—yes, even you will say flippant, dismissive, perhaps even inappropriate things from time to time. We forgive you for not making our lives better immediately, for getting entrenched in the bureaucracy of setting up a new administration, for misjudgments and plain old mistakes.

Forgiveness that comes even before the transgression, actually fore-giveness, is pure gift and as such, more really from God than from human beings. To offer it marks an intention, a hope, to live gracefully and to honor as best we can the integrity and compassion on which this country was founded. In offering fore-giveness to you, we strive to act as channels for God's grace. To be a channel, however, one has to be open and many of us have been far too grabby and clutching of late. So, yes, in answer to your invitation, we will try to do this together. And it isn't to say that we will forgive everything; we are hard taskmasters when it comes to honesty and integrity. But that is perhaps in great part why you were elected: you have inspired many people's trust.

Twenty years ago my father, Alistair Cooke, was pressed in an interview to give his view of where he believed America was going. Here is just a snippet of what he said, "Perhaps, in every period of affluence, America needs a national crisis—a depression, a collapse of the money market—to throw up a benevolent leader (he had better be benevolent if the system is to hold) who mobilizes the best of America instead of the worst." (*Alistair Cooke Reporting America*. Overlook Press, 2008. P392). You have clearly risen to the challenge.

If this is a letter of forgiveness, it is also a letter of confession. I for one made a grievous error in misjudging the American people by equating America with a particular administration. I was ashamed of this country and shouldn't have been; shame on me instead.

With Advent approaching, I am reminded of the great expectations and hopes of the people of Ancient Israel. For so long they anticipated the coming Messiah, the Lord of hosts, the King of Kings. One who would reign forever and ever, a mighty and glorious ruler, a savior, a Prince of Peace.

And what they got was a tiny, helpless baby. There's a lesson here for us, I think. Our expectations for your presidency are as much about us as they are about you. We long to hope again; we want to feel engaged and alive and as though what we do makes a difference. In the giddiness that many feel at your election, unrealistic expectations are laid upon you, born equally of fear and hope. For this we in turn need your forgiveness. But you can't stir the spirit of a nation and not expect it to blow out of control from time to time any more than we can realistically call you to measure up to our wildest hopes.

This is a time for settling and for remembering that our new leader is a human being, though a remarkable one indeed.

I don't mean to suggest that you are a gift from God any more than every life on earth is a gift from God. But the gold, frankincense and myrrh that we are about to lay at your feet are nothing short of the global economy, the health of your people and the peace of the world. Some gifts for a newborn ruler.

You have been given an enormous job and the honor and burden of bearing the hopes and dreams of a nation. We know you view your newly elected position with the greatest solemnity and seriousness, but take time, as a small boy would, to play with the puppy.

Sincerely,

Susan Cooke Kittredge

Come, come, whoever you are.
Wonderer, worshipper, lover of leaving.
It doesn't matter.
Ours is not a caravan of despair.
Come, even if you have broken your vow
a thousand times
Come, yet again, come, come.

-Rumi

Families of the OMH

- Prayers for Jim Hanna and Ella May Speer
- Prayers for Lena Brazier
- Prayers for Nancy Strong
- Prayers for Deb Reed and Carol Leech

From Spiritual Life

Notes From the Spiritual Life Committee

The snow falling on my shoulders as I rushed my shivering children from school today, reminded me that winter is just around the corner. In fact, it seems to have rounded that corner already, even if I'm not quite ready for it. And, with winter, of course, comes Christmas -- another wonderful season that I'm sometimes not quite ready for (even if my kids have been ready since May).

At our recent meeting, the Spiritual Life Committee discussed the subject of Christmas and, of course, Christmas services. There will be three Christmas Eve services at the Old Meeting House this year. Pastor Susan will lead a 5 o'clock family service and a 7 o'clock service, while Pastor David will lead a 9 o'clock service. In addition, the SLC is exploring the idea of having the church open for some quiet prayer time on a day or days during the Christmas season. This would be something akin to our Easter vigil, although there would be no "shifts" or sign up sheet. The church would just be open and heated during a set period of time. People would be free to come for

quiet prayer and reflection, perhaps to grab a moment of spiritual peace in a busy time. We are still deciding if this idea is feasible and are working out the logistics. After everything is worked out, we will announce the day/s, time/s in church.

We are also continuing to look at how well the online newsletter is serving our community. Please feel free to contact us with thoughts on this subject or on any other matter dealing with the spiritual life of our church.

Wishing you many joys during this busy, but blessed, time of year.

-- Carolyn Scoppettone

Missions Spotlight

Thanks to the planet's rotation and the ending of Daylight Savings Time, we are heading into the dark days, simultaneously entering into Christendom's birth of Light. The Missions Committee hopes that you will sign up to contribute to the food boxes that we put together for families from East Montpelier and Berlin Elementary Schools: turkey, bag of potatoes, bag of carrots, and box of stuffing.

Anticipating the Christmas season of giving, please consider contributing in the name of a loved one to the various missions that we sponsor as a church, or to those of your own choosing. We will publish a more complete listing next month on the website.

From the Trustees

Trustees Have Busy Fall

The evaluation of the OMH roof was completed in early fall. The results helped form the basis of a grant to the State of Vermont Division for Historic Preservation. The result of the evaluation was a “good news/bad news” situation. Although both evaluators said the roof would need to be replaced “soon”, it appeared that with some emergency repair the life of the current roof could be extended a bit longer. This didn’t give the OMH grant writer (David Schutz) the best possible case for a grant but Trustees, with support from the Executive Board, decided to submit a grant this year anyway. The grant process offers a maximum of \$15,000, which has to be matched by the recipient. Although the OMH currently has sufficient funds in the repair account to match the \$15,000, the estimated cost of the roof replacement is in the range of \$50,000. Expectations for a successful grant this year are not high, but we will have brought the situation to the attention of the Grantors and the grant can be re-submitted for subsequent rounds of funding. In order to address the emergency need to replace about 68 defective slate pieces the Trustees have engaged Schumacher Brothers Construction to do the repair. It is expected that the work will be done later in November at a cost of about \$1,000.

On October 18 a very successful work-bee was held and

the buildings and grounds were prepared for winter. Also in October, four of the Parish House lower corner boards that were showing signs of rot were replaced by Jeff Bean of Clark Builders. Although Jeff is not a member of the OMH he generously donated his time and the materials needed to do this repair.

Other work on the OMH and Parish House included:

1. Installation of a portion of floor in the attic space over the choir loft- materials and labor donated by Trustee Norm Hill.
2. Replacement of two boards in the OMH handicapped ramp by Trustee Malcolm Fielder – labor and materials donated.
3. The Parish House dimmer switch in the ground floor big room tends to heat up when in use. Trevor Lewis checked this and he determined that the current load was within the specification for the switch.
4. Replacement of a control on one of the overhead lights in the Parish House kitchen by Charlie Waterman.

Given the high cost of utilities, Trustees urge that persons using the facilities make sure that the heat is turned down to 55 and all lights are off when leaving. Although we all should be good stewards of our buildings, it might be wise to designate an individual from each group that is meeting to

assure that heat and lights are checked.

From Finance

FIGURING OUR DOLLARS AND "SENSE"

The end of our financial year is only seven weeks away. As of November 9, with 87% of the year passed, 80% of the OMH pledge dollars have been received. We do hope that you will be able to fulfill your pledge (if you haven't already, and 25 of you have) by year's end. If you haven't a good idea of where you stand in your pledge fulfillment or if you've forgotten whether you've pledged or not, either call Cherie Staples at 476-2541 or email her at skyearth1@aol.com.

Here's a synopsis of the current revenue and expenses as of Nov. 9:

Total income is \$104,367 of a budgeted \$131,877, with \$21,000 remaining to come from pledges. Fundraising is under budget by about \$1,100 with no further fundraising planned for this year. Rents are about \$400 above the budget amount of \$2,000. Non-pledging contributors have given \$5,922, of a budget amount of \$9,795.

Total expenses for the operating costs are \$6,115 of a budgeted \$11,361. We will be putting \$2,000 into the Repair Funds by the end of the year, which will raise the total of the operating costs to \$8,115, and

probably will see another thousand dollars or so of other operating costs by the end of the year. We are hoping to end about \$2,000 under budget in operating costs, mostly due to significant decreases in postage and printing costs which at this moment are \$1,454 under budget due to the electronic newsletter.

The Missions Committee has spent \$9,090 of their \$11,989 budget. The members decided to reserve money until near the end of the year in case immediate needs arise, such as heating oil assistance, .

A total expense for personnel is \$82,137 of a budgeted \$96,538. So far we've paid \$975 to the ministers and lay people who have been alternating with David in leading worship. We are planning to reimburse most, if not all, of that cost from the Sabbatical Fund, which is in a Certificate of Deposit, with the approval of the Executive Board.

Looking ahead to 2009, the Finance Committee's budget preparation is in a bit of limbo right now, not knowing exactly what the ministerial costs will be in 2009 as the Search Committee wends its way through applications and interviews.

The members of the Finance Committee believe in the strength of this congregation and in its support for our church, its leadership, and its work in this community and the greater world community. And we trust that you believe likewise and will find exchanging your financial

energy for the energy you receive during worship, during all the happenings in the Parish House, and in your friendships in this community of faith to be an honorable and worthy practice.

Sunday School News

The pageant is up and running with a small but enthusiastic cast! We are planning to rehearse during Sunday School time for the month of November followed by full church service rehearsals on Dec. 7th and 14th. **We will have a dress rehearsal on Saturday, December 20th at 9:30 am and the pageant will be during the church service on December 21st.** Any folks who would like to help with set and/or animals, please contact me, Michelle Gardner, either at church each week or at 229-0905, 498-8720 or mckgardner@hotmail.com.

The Junior High Youth Group will meet as scheduled each week during Sunday School time. However, I would like a group of the Jr. High Youth to perform the Recessional for the Pageant which would be the Lord of the Dance. I would love for this to be done as Morris dancers complete with bells and white outfits! :) If any other Youth would like to be involved in any way - please come find me and let's talk!

Happy Advent, Everyone! Michelle Gardner

From the Search Committee

Search Committee Update

I thought answering some questions I've heard asked might be helpful to all. As the search process moves along, I'll continue to give quick updates in church as well.

Who is on the Search Committee?

The following are members of the Search Committee: Lowell VanDerlip (chair), Marcia Bowles, Jim Tringe, Richard Brock, Diana Fielder, Jessie Taylor, Wendy Soliday, Kim Sturgis, Kate Gustafson, Peter Gilbert, Linda Cueto, Tim Shea, and Peter Gilbert (ex officio)

Can I ask members about the committee's work?

You certainly can, and should! However, committee members cannot talk to you about individual candidates for pastor as we have a responsibility to respect the confidentiality of all applicants. But outside of questions regarding individuals, we welcome your inquiries.

What have you folks been doing?

Quite a lot! We were fortunate to have the Futures Committee Report as a starting point for the search and call process. Over the summer we wrote a Church Profile for the Old Meeting House and submitted it to the Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ. The profile paints a picture of our church, if you will, detailing all aspects of our current congregational life and how we envision our future needs for spiritual growth. This profile is

posted on the UCC website. Persons interested in our position submit a Ministerial Profile to the UCC office. The UCC does a basic criminal record and background check and then forwards all eligible candidates to our committee. The Ministerial Profile includes information about the candidate's educational background, experience, employment requirements, a detailed faith statement, and eight written references. This fall we have been reviewing profiles submitted to us and following up with persons in whom we have a particular interest. This follow up includes requesting a tape or DVD of a sermon as well as a letter expressing why they have a particular interest in our church. While pursuing these steps, we will continue to evaluate new Ministerial Profiles as they are sent to us.

What happens next?

After reviewing Ministerial Profiles, viewing DVDs of sermons, and evaluating the personalized letters of interest from candidates, we will narrow our search to those candidates we feel could be a good match for the needs of our church community. We will then check references, conduct personal interviews, and arrange for members of our committee to visit a neutral pulpit to hear the candidate preach.

Will there be an interim minister?

We will be discussing this with the Executive Committee. By the time you read this, a decision will likely have been made. Given the time line required for the search and call process, it seems to me very likely that we will seek an interim

minister. We want to be sure to give ourselves the time we need to do a thorough and thoughtful search while providing the church with ministerial support and guidance during the process.

Why is the process referred to as "Search and Call"?

This process is like many employment processes, but it is much more. We want to be sure that the person called to our ministry meets our unique needs and theirs as well. We want the right match. We seek God's guidance in giving us the wisdom to act as good stewards of our community. We are thankful to our congregation for the confidence you have placed in us and for your continued patience.

Over the past months since Susan's announcement, I think many of us have come to a clearer vision that this church is ultimately about our individual and collective relationship to God, understanding of the life and teachings of Jesus, and our loving care for one another. It is difficult to lose a minister, particularly one as loved as Susan. But I would bet, were Susan here to weigh in on the search process, she would echo Obama's refrain that "it's not about me, it's about us" with the "us" being our church community. We will continue with our search to find the leadership best able help us deepen our spiritual roots and nurture our love for one other within and beyond our church community.

Respectfully, Lowell VanDerlip

Apple Snow

The ash tree shook off
leaves yesterday,
branches nearly bare.
The green season's
ending;
cornfield's brown and
sere
A few sentinel stalks
remain ghost
reminders
of close-ranked rows,
to become shadow
whisperers
on moon-filled nights
when snow has come.

Orange-flamed maple
glows in the hedge
row;
even without the sun,
it shines.
Gardens need cleaning
of dried flower stalks
and wood waits
stacking.
Autumn deeds as
geese sound in the
sky.

Winter's breath is
hinted in the
northwest wind
and heavy jackets are
searched for
as these earth-cooling
days shorten and
Orion rises at
midnight.

Just as the pen
strokes the paper,
I think of the frosted
blades of grass.
Stop growing they are
told.

The summer has
finished and cold
comes.
The dry wood needs
moving from the shed
to
the deck by the door.

~~~~~  
the wind train howls  
this morning  
late October  
cold foreteller  
northern storm  
a scant inch of snow  
but  
the apple tree  
bears green leaves yet  
its dead wood tinged  
with snow  
white blossoms ....  
spring's promise.

Cherie Staples, October  
2008

Many thanks to the  
congregants of  
The Old Meeting  
House for the many  
cans of fruit and other  
non-perishables that  
The Onion River Food  
Shelf, Inc. received as  
a result of the  
collection the first  
Sunday of October.  
Also, as Mal and I  
participated in the  
sort-a-thon at the  
Foodbank in  
September, I was  
amazed at the number  
of people from OMH  
that were present, but  
also how enjoyable it  
was to share a few  
hours on a Saturday  
morning with ones  
who were eager to help  
others with needs in  
many ways other  
than the way we were  
that morning. So,  
again, from all of us at  
the foodshelf a hearty  
thank you for your  
caring and support of  
our cause.

We are seeing a  
gradual increase in  
our client base each  
month, but at the  
same time there  
appears to be families  
that we have served  
since the first of the  
year who are once  
again moving on and  
transitioning to a new  
community. We are

still exchanging ideas about how to  
grow and how to serve each person  
in the best ways we can with  
Victoria King and Jessie Taylor of  
the Montpelier Food Pantry, as well  
as, since the first of September, with  
Pastor McEathron of The Old Brick  
Church who has been researching  
ways in which East Montpelier can  
establish their own food shelf.

The annual fundraiser, Chicken Pie  
Dinner, was held on October 4.  
Even though the reservations  
started out very slowly, we served  
meals to a full house at the 5 and 7  
p.m. seatings, and to almost 80 at  
the noon seating, counting the take  
outs. As we have in the past, the  
full dinner for 20 went to the Good  
Samaritan Haven on Sunday  
evening. I would like to thank all  
who gave so generously of their  
time, expertise and willingness to  
get this event done, and special  
thanks to Janice Waterman and  
Marcia Bowles who continue to  
produce such wonderful, amazing  
biscuits, my stalwart crew of squash  
peelers, those who cooked chickens,  
made coleslaw and apple  
crisps, Paul Bowles who directed the  
dining room crews, dishwashers,  
table setters, Barb Ploof's publicity  
expertise, Liz Pritchett who  
apprenticed in the biscuit making,  
the rest of the kitchen crews and  
Maybeth Butler for answering the  
phone continuously those last few  
days before the event . It really does  
take a whole community to make a  
very successful fundraiser!!

Diana Fielder

Honor the memory of a loved one by donating a flower arrangement for a Sunday Church service on an important anniversary.

Contact Victoria King (229 4674) or Wendy Soliday (229-9594) if you are interested.

### **Five Members of the Confirmation Class Officially Join the Old Meeting House Congregation**

Five new young members joined the congregation of the Old Meeting House on Sunday, November 2<sup>nd</sup>, in a service they helped design, lead and create. The group was all members of the Confirmation Class of 2008 and included Alexandra Riggen, Adam Riggen, Alyssa Reed, Piper French and Andrew Becker.

The Confirmation service itself included musical offerings by Piper French and Alyssa Reed (a Bach double violin concerto), Alexandra and Adam Riggen (a Spanish folksong), a duet by Michelle Gardner and Andy Hooper (“By My Side” from “Godspell), and perhaps the most moving musical offering of all, a rendition of “Angel Band” led by the Confirmation group and accompanied by Patti Casey and Andrew Vachon.

The sermon consisted of brief and poignant offerings from each member of the Class.

The actual Confirmation portion of the service was led by Associate Pastor David Connor with assistance from the five mentors whom the Confirmation Class members had chosen when the process a year ago: Wendy Soliday, Peter Holman, Elizabeth Davis, Celina Moore and John Hollar.

The responsive prayer, offered with members of congregation, consisted of a series of Haiku poems, through which the members of the class and their mentors expressed their individual thoughts about God and spirituality. Here are those prayers:

I believe God is  
not an old man in the sky,  
but all around us.

You don't have to be  
religious in order to  
be spiritual

God seldom giggles.  
But I find myself thinking  
that She often smiles

My dog is happy.  
I think that she knows something;  
Dog backwards is God

God makes good happen.  
God makes bad happen also,  
but just with reason

I've often felt God.  
But like air, it's mostly when  
I stop to notice.

Child grows unnoticed,  
quietly finding purpose  
and becomes person.

God is around us  
everywhere surrounding love  
guides us every day

Stop and look  
around;  
realize that many things  
are  
perfect

month for Good Samaritan Haven,  
the homeless shelter in Barre. The  
shelter depends on us to feed the 15  
– 20 people that are there on our  
two nights every month. This is a  
fun and rewarding experience.

It's a great way to involve  
kids and help them  
understand the  
hardships of life that  
some people have to  
contend with. You  
provide the entire  
meal, main dish,  
salad, and  
dessert. If you  
feel that you're  
not able to do  
the whole meal  
yourself, team  
up with  
someone else in  
the church that  
may also be  
reluctant to  
take it on alone.

*Parents & Infants Together*

A nurturing and supportive class  
for parents-to-be and parents with  
babies newborn to twelve months.  
We will share ideas on sleep, food,  
caregiving, infant development  
and play along with songs and lap  
games for babies. We will also  
create one or two simple toys for  
your baby.

Time: Wednesdays, 10:15 – 11:45  
am

Dates: January 28th – March 25<sup>th</sup>,  
2009. (not Feb 25<sup>th</sup>)

Location: The Old Meeting House

Cost: \$100 for eight week session.

Registration required. Class size is  
limited.

To register please call the Orchard  
Valley Waldorf School 456-7400.

*This class will be taught by Joan  
Kahn. For more information on the  
class contact Joan at 223-3005 or*

We have no one  
signed up to do  
any of the meals  
starting in  
January. Please

consider doing a  
meal on one of the  
dates listed below.

There is a sign-up  
sheet in the Parish

House. You may also call  
me at 223-2162 or e-mail

me at [jhackney67@gmail.com](mailto:jhackney67@gmail.com).

There is a brochure in the Parish  
House with the sign-up sheet that  
explains in detail how to do the  
meal. You can call me, and I would  
be happy to explain everything, too.

already

**The Old Meeting House needs  
your help!** We have made a  
commitment to provide two meals a

Here are the dates for the first four months of 2009:

January 4            Sunday  
January 10          Saturday  
February 1          Sunday  
February 7          Saturday  
March 1             Sunday  
March 7             Saturday  
April 5 Sunday  
April 11             Saturday

- John Hackney

**The Montpelier Community**  
**Gospel Choir** invites you to our **Fall**  
**2008 Concerts**  
November 23rd at St. Michael's  
Episcopal Church, 16 Bradley Ave.,

Brattleboro VT at 2 PM  
(to benefit Brattleboro area Pastoral  
Counseling Center)  
and  
November 30th at Unitarian Church  
of Montpelier, 130 Main St.,  
Montpelier at 7 PM

Comprised of members from various  
religious and musical backgrounds,  
the MCGC sound reaches from deep  
within and  
touch hearts and souls in a  
powerful way. Combining soul, jazz,  
original and traditional Gospel  
music under direction of John  
Harrison, a  
toe-tapping, hand-clapping, knee-  
slapping, aisle-swaying and seat-  
thumping, exuberant sound  
emerges. The choir shares the joy,  
hope  
and inspiration it experiences  
through music.  
No admission charged, free-will  
offering gladly received.  
For more information, call 802-454-  
8403 or visit [www.vtgospel.com](http://www.vtgospel.com)