

First Church in Ipswich, U.C.C.

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Rev. Dr. Rebecca Anne Pugh

Beloved Church,

During the prayers of the people last Spring, my 3-year-old leaned into me and whispered, “Mama, can we pray for Aunt Kata?” My sister-in-law had been diagnosed with cancer. We hadn’t said much to Josie, but that morning in church, I learned we didn’t need to. Coming to church every Sunday, she knew that worries this big we don’t hold alone: we bring our prayers to church.

This is why I come to church.

At church, Josie and all the children learn that the Bible is important, not because I tell her it is, but because she sees it in the pews and we open it up each week in class. At church we learn that everyone can pray: a 5th grader can pray for a family he knows, a choir member can pray for the state of the world, a longtime parishioner can lift the same prayer up week after week. At church, we learn that eating together is important. In this way, we feed one another not only around the altar table, but in the parish hall, and both build a stronger church.

And this year, I want to lift up the teachings of stewardship. As we enter stewardship season, I want people to learn that church is a place of generosity, where people give in the hope and trust that together, we can do good. I want Josie to learn that no matter what we have, we always have enough to share.

Right now, under our noses, First Church is doing remarkable ministry:

- Our High Schoolers are organizing relief and cleanup in Lawrence and Andover while our Middle Schoolers are not only attending church and a peer-led church school class, but are dedicated in assisting in Beth Viehmann’s 4th and 5th grade class.
- Our own Tom Reichard carves wooden storytelling props for our classrooms while our Days for Girls Project brings our sewers together.
- Our children will be filling backpacks with art supplies for Syrian Refugees while Amy Pigeon and Lynn Armstrong and other healers in the church plan their next trip to Guatemala to work on women’s health and diabetes care.
- Lucas and Joanne are bringing in stunning new music for the choir and the church, discovered by Lucas in his travels as a young adult musician, while the deacons are praying and learning how to offer spiritual blessings in ever increasing ways.

- Teams are making warm food to welcome the travelers who come to church, while a new plant-based, faith-based cooking class is getting organized for Sundays.

And these are only a few of our ministries.

In a world that needs glimpses of justice and hope, glimpses of the Kingdom, First Church has been a haven this past year.

Now this year, we're asking something new. We're asking you to pledge, to return to pledging or to pledge for the first time. This church is up to too much good to worry from one need to the next. This year, the Finance committee and the Trustees are working on a more substantial budget so that it's easier to plan what the ministries of the church can be. With growing membership and mounting enthusiasm, we ask you to pledge so that we can dream bigger about the impact our church can make, both in our own lives and the lives of the wider community. We have enclosed a pledge card here, and we have a pile of them in the back of the church.

We have a bonus too: if you return your pledge card by October 15, you can have a free ticket to the Auction and Art show Gala on November 3, 2018.

The children in our church know that when we gather, their prayers are welcome. My dream is that this year, we take on the spiritual practice of generous giving, and my request is that you risk pledging. Help us to dream on solid ground, to be able to plan for the coming year with an openness to God's call and the ability to add stability to our programs. I know this is a shift, but may this call to something new be part of your spiritual path this Fall.

In faith,

Rev. Christine Hribar