



# Vestry Voices

## The Church Family Newsletter

First Congregational  
Church of Clinton

February 2023

Editor  
Charles T. Tamminen

## Be Transformed

[H]aving gone, then, disciple all the nations, (baptizing them -- to the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all, whatever I did command you,) and lo, I am with you all the days -- till the full end of the age

*Matthew 28:19-20 (YLT)*



Rev. Gary Kiontke

One of the flaws of Protestant Evangelicalism is the tendency to emphasize conversion over transformation. Jesus said His eleven chosen followers would teach people to observe (obey) whatever He commanded them. This requires more than a person

making a decision to follow Jesus rather than follow the way he would choose for himself. It requires a radical change in a person. His character must be re-made so he will exhibit new behaviors – behaviors that align with God’s teaching through Moses.

One reason why churches fall short in the task of teaching transformation is that it is more difficult than conversion. Human methods can seem to produce conversions; but, no human method is adequate to produce long term transformation from a heart that desires to go its own way in sin into a heart that is only satisfied in living as Jesus lived while He was on earth.

**Biblical wisdom is one way in which God can transform human hearts. Here is a portion of the definition of wisdom from the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*:**

*[It is the] teaching of a personal God who is holy and just and expects those who know Him to exhibit His character in the many practical affairs of life. ... The emphasis of [Biblical] wisdom [is] that the human will, in the realm of practical matters, [is] to be subject to divine causes. ... Hebrew wisdom ... [is] ... practical, based on revealed principles of right and wrong, to be lived out in daily life.*

Notice the emphasis on moral living in a practical sense in everyday life.

And, that correct principles have been revealed to people by God, with whom they are experiencing a personal relationship. But, most importantly, notice that wisdom results in a person subjecting his or her will to God’s will to allow Him to direct the events of the daily life of the person.

**Solomon’s most challenging wisdom book is Ecclesiastes. One key is found in the verses that close chapter seven and begin chapter eight which say:**

*See, this alone I have found, that God made man upright, and they -- they have sought out many devices. Who [is] as the wise? and who knoweth the interpretation of a thing? The wisdom of man causeth his face to shine, and the hardness of his face is changed. (Ecclesiastes 7:29 & 8:1, YLT)*

Observe that Solomon says wisdom changes the face of a man. This would be because his character is being changed. And, as his character is changed, he can begin to live out behaviors that are pleasing to God – in accordance with the Torah given through Moses.

**The command for disciples of Jesus to be transformed from the inside by being renewed comes from the apostle Paul’s letter to the churches in Rome:**

*And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:2, NAS)*

Renewal comes from waiting on God with patience: “But they that

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## Be Transformed ( ... continued from page #1 )

wait upon the LORD shall renew [their] strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; [and] they shall walk, and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31, KJV). And the apostle Paul told the churches in Corinth that because God is renewing them inwardly every day they should not give up: “Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:16, NAS).

**In the same letter to the churches in Corinth, the apostle Paul makes a bold statement of truth about the transformations God is making in those who have turned to The Lord [Jesus Christ]:**

*But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18, NAS)*

Peter told scattered Christians to hope for the grace Jesus will bring at His (second) revelation; and, as obedient children – not to conform to their former ignorant lusts – but to be made holy in every manner of conduct (1 Peter 1:13-15, paraphrase).

Two things need to be clarified here: Peter is urging Christians gathered in a local church and they are to

be made holy by someone outside themselves. Putting these two passages together, we learn transformation cannot be done alone, or without the help of God.

**The last Biblical truth about transformation will come from the apostle Paul’s letter to the churches in Philippi. It combines many of the truths we have considered so far:**

*You all must work out your salvation with fear and trembling because God is working in you all ... you all must not murmur or doubt ... then you all will be blameless children of God in a perverse generation, shining as lights (Philippians 2:12-15, paraphrase).*

All Christians have a responsibility to work together to be transformed into the likeness of Jesus in order to witness to His glory in a fallen and crooked world. This can only be done by God’s wisdom that comes by waiting in hope for God to do His transforming work in us, while seeking Him in His Word. Christians must be doing what God has given them to do in their everyday lives without complaining to Him about how difficult their assignment is. Finally, we have hope because the apostle Paul said we are being transformed by The Lord and His Spirit. ~~~~~

## Sundays in February

We will have Communion on February 5 and 19.

February 26 is the first Sunday of Lent and we start with a story that anticipates Easter with Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. The March *Vestry Voices* will have an article about themes the Gospel of John lays out that are appropriate for Lent. Here is an “appetizer” with one key word for each week: humbled, denied, delayed, rejected.

Here are the details on the sermon texts and themes for each of the worship services:

Date	Scripture	Theme
February 5	<i>John 6:35-37, 40, 43-44, 48-51, 53-58;</i> <i>Psalms 34:1-10</i>	Jesus is The Bread of Life come down from heaven
February 12	<i>John 7:37-52;</i> <i>Psalms 147:1-11</i>	Jesus promises The Living Water of The Spirit
February 19	<i>John 9:1-17, 35-38</i> <i>Psalms 27:1-4</i>	The Light of the world opens blind eyes
February 26	<i>John 11:1-4, 7-9, 14-15, 20-27, 35-40, 43-44;</i> <i>Psalms 107:27-30</i>	Jesus is The Resurrection and The Life

# Missions Report

by Sally Camara

**WELCOMING ALLIANCE FOR REFUGEE MINISTRY**



# 2022 IMPACT

### PREGNANT MOM & BABY CARE



IN HOSPITAL DOULA SUPPORT, PRE AND POST NATAL CARE FOR

**13** MOMS & BABIES



**68**

APARTMENTS SET UP



**23,491+**

HOURS OF VOLUNTEER TIME

**258** TRAINEES AT  
**22** TRAININGS



ENGLISH LEARNING CLASSES



**107** STUDENTS  
**112** CLASSES

**21**  
PARTNERSHIPS WITH AREA AGENCIES



### WOMEN'S GROUPS



**98** WOMEN  
**112** GROUP MEETINGS

# 791 REFUGEES SERVED



**717** TRAINEES TO DATE  
FROM **88** CHURCHES



FROM OVER **24** COUNTRIES



**19** STUDENTS TUTORED

**23** EVENTS FOR REFUGEES!

**9** EVENTS FOR VOLUNTEERS!



**301** ACTIVE VOLUNTEERS

**73** STUDENT DRIVERS  
**66** LICENSED

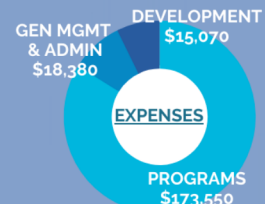
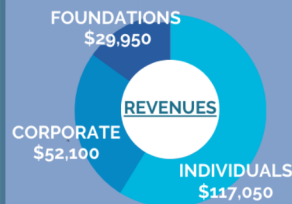


**64** REFUGEE FAMILIES BEFRIENDED



BUILDING A BRIDGE BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND OUR CITY'S REFUGEES

[www.warmwelcoming.org](http://www.warmwelcoming.org)  
est 2016



## Missions Report

( ... continued from page #3 )

**NEW MINISTRY OUTREACH** - As we have worked with refugees for several years, we have identified a significant need that is not being addressed in the community, and that is for mental health care that is culturally sensitive and applicable to their needs. We have done our research and are responding to this need. In March we will pilot our first Hope Group for refugee women to address depression and significant life challenges using interpersonal skills development in a safe and supportive environment. Please keep this new venture in your prayers.

Since WARM is a local ministry (Worcester), there are opportunities for those of you who are reading this to serve if the Lord leads you in this way. Apartment set-ups are normally done on Tuesdays and Thursdays. We can always use people to make beds, hang curtains, put away dishes, set up rooms etc. Also, if you have extra household items in good condition, they can be donated to Fresh Start in Hudson which supplies WARM with all the apartment needs. English

classes are taught on Friday mornings. This is a time of personally connecting with a refugee and helping them improve their English skills through writing, conversation, flash cards and other tools. There is also a need for sponsors for those taking driving license tests. This entails having a current driver's license and sitting in the back seat while the road test is done. These are normally done at the Leominster RMV. Pray about where the Lord may possibly open up a door for YOU to serve. I can guarantee, you will be blessed in the giving of your prayers, time, efforts, and material items. "Give and it will be given unto you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be poured into your lap; for whatever measure you deal out to others will be dealt to you in return." Luke 6:38.

As we look ahead to this new year, we are thankful that we get to continue to serve God by welcoming and loving refugees. ~~~~~

## ***It Just Happens\*... "While shoveling the driveway..."***

**By Petros**

It Just Happens\*... it came upon me in the dark, heavy snowfall to shovel the driveway. In the silence of the night, I was the only one making the strokes of a shovel scraping the rough ground. Usually, I hear others trying to stay ahead of the snow, as well. It occurred to me that we were the only family with a large driveway as part of the home God has blessed us with. I couldn't think of any neighbors who had as large of a driveway as ours. For some, it may be a curse to have to shovel a small parking lot. But the blessings of having space to work on the cars and projects, ability to invite everyone to join our neighborhood yard sales, and a reason to wear shorts while shoveling felt like being part of God's master plan. I was humbled. The next day, the driveway was completely dry from the sun. Not a wet spot nor a trace of snow to be found!

Our home was more than a dream come true, from my wife driving by and setting up a "showing," only to have an emergency room visit just before. I thought we should cancel, but my wife said to go take a look so we took "turns" to see the house. After my turn, I was impressed by the character of a house that was 250 years old, and the land that overlooked the pond with Mt. Wachusett ten miles away in the background, with hardly another house visible. It was too good to be ours ... could we even afford it?!! I couldn't get too excited as my partner had rejected most of the homes I discovered, including a steal on a contractor's "built to please his wife" bank foreclosure sale on the other side of the pond.

But after her turn, we were in agreement that this was a home we wanted! Too many "what about" and "could have happened," to God's glory to mention while abiding in His time to close on our home.

Since we moved in, I've always felt our blessing was meant to be shared. Quite often, our visitors will mention how they feel a peace in our home; besides the blessing upon blessing from God that allows us to have His peace and joy. The prior resident was my geometry teacher, who entered the convent and became a Sister of Notre Dame. She also had a brother in the Jesuit Order. It Just Happens\*... I recall a Daily Bread article about a prayer warrior who had a prayer closet, and people could sense the years of prayers that were like layers of paint on the walls. After retiring from the Order, she was very active in serving the community. When her lived-with sister passed, and her eyes failing, she put the house on the market. She had two interested parties before we came along. One had to sell their home before buying; and a contractor who wanted it. I was not aware she was holding out the sale of her home for someone who would not build on the lower acre down to the pond, but the rest is history or more likely God's plan. At times, some of her friends and neighbors would drop by and share amazing stories and/or how they had been taken in to live at the home. We have come up with an Annual Free Lilacs Day because so many of her friends would stop by when the lilacs blossomed. One of my thoughts was to turn our back yard into a public sledding hill, with a horse drawn

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## *It Just Happens\*... ( ... continued from page #4 )*

sleigh ride making loops across the earth dam between the ponds, while Christmas carols played from Bose speakers hanging from the pine trees. My partner was not fond of the idea. I had hopes of a barn to have caroling, serving hot chocolate, and a chance to share the Candy Cane story and the real reason for the season. As time passed and my responsibilities expanded, public sledding was a liability I could not afford.

Our visitors relish the view from our back yard. It is unexpected to see so much of God's creation behind a house on the street. I'm often asked how long it takes to mow, which I proudly reply "an hour and a half unless I'm collecting the grass for our chickens." Then I share how God has even provided the mower(s) to do the job. There is too much to share on how God provided, so that will be another article on "... While I Was Mowing." Over the years, I started accumulating yard maintenance equipment and tools. I had plans to build/extend my storage shed, when I got the idea to build a barn with the money from the sale of our home the kids were raised in. With their blessings, I was ready to consolidate under a House of Worship. A barn large enough to have hoedowns with a lot of dancing and praising God. When I mentioned my idea to my "darling" she was alarmed and requested nothing too big. My bubble was burst and I concluded that if it wasn't large enough then I would just expand off the current shed. However, I couldn't give up on my thoughts on having a barn. The silent treatments crushed me. And the thought of losing the love of my life was mortifying. It took a couple drives by, but I learned my priority is maintaining our marriage. To my partner's credit, she has nixed other "inspirational projects" and, in hind sight, she was totally right. I wrote a Vestry Voice article on my once in a life time opportunity to purchase the restaurant my father started, at a family price. It was my earliest "vision" of Gospel Bluegrass playing as people gathered to fellowship. God blessed me with a woman who has vision and determination. She could see I would not have the time to maintain another property, and out of her care and concern, she held her ground.

It Just Happens\*... we were out together and came upon a barn that looked to be about the size I needed as a House of Worship and storage. I sheepishly mentioned it (after all we were looking at sheep, etc.). And I couldn't believe my ears and had to ask her to repeat, "That is a good size for a barn." Wow! That was a couple years, ago. Since then I have been researching, from solar panels to the requirements of a House of Worship for a tax exempt status. The info gathering and work plans went from slow to a halt during the late fall. Things were not coming together, so we had to give it a rest. The other week, we met with an attorney for counsel on the legalities of starting a tax exempt House of Worship. His advice was to build the barn as a private, personal barn and as things evolved, I could file for tax exemption, then. We left,

thinking that was great advice. It was the jump start I needed to get back on the track of the actual design and build. It Just Happens\*... during our lunch stop we were discussing barn features. I shared my vision of the rear of the first floor, which would be a wall of French doors that would open to an outdoor deck that would be the full width of the barn. She had a desire to add a second floor balcony. This was an amazing change of heart from her vision of a smaller building to a full size barn large enough to dance and praise God. It was also confirmation that the Holy Spirit was at work, because I had the same thought of a second floor balcony, but never mentioned it because the first floor deck was a hard sell at one time. Both extensions to the rear will give a wonderful perch to enjoy the view of the outback. We shared our visions of a loft above for quieter fellowship, and the room for overnight stays complete with a kitchen and second floor bathroom. Meanwhile my wife started sketching all that we had envisioned, and workable sketches for the front and rear of the barn were done before we paid the bill!

It Just Happens\*... the next day, Pastor Gary and I discussed the prior legal advice received and came to the conclusion that "full disclosure" was a better approach. From his experience, it would be harder to initiate a change after paying taxes versus starting out as a full non-profit. His thought lined up with a good source from the Building Inspector's Office, to file as if "the dream" became a reality. It Just Happens\*... Pastor Gary preached on a theme that I have valued and been witness to: ***"Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor uselessly." Psalm 127:1***

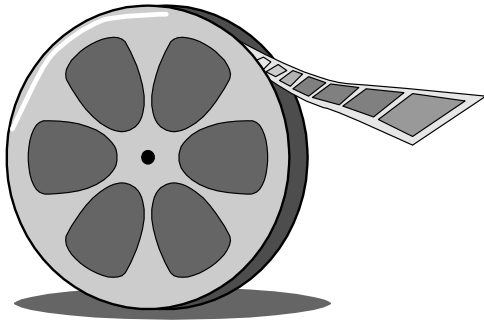
My desire to share our blessing with the community appears to be taking root, ten years later; besides the seven fruit trees planted last year that will provide bushels of apples, peaches, pears and plums for years to come. The notion that the barn is taking on a renewed Spirit is quite an inspiration initiated by my wife. The Holy Spirit of God is moving in my wife and that is giving me a renewed hope for the barn to be built. I've learned over the years through prayer (especially the unanswered ones) that God has a time for His Will to be done. It Just Happens\*... Dr. Robert Jeffress was sharing that the Holy Spirit of God indwells all believers. Jesus said that He will not leave us as orphans, but puts within us the Holy Spirit who is constantly ready to bring us to the next level in our walk and responsibilities. We will grow in the Holy Spirit by keeping His Word close to heart and praying as the Holy Spirit leads. To obey and submit to the Holy Spirit will help us to avoid the distractions and sin that take us off the path God has designed for our life. It Just Happens\*... when I listen to Gospel Bluegrass the Holy Spirit in me dances, and whatever my world is stuck in – I am set free! His Purpose brings our hearts together, but it comes in abiding in His time, not ours.

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## ***It Just Happens\*...*** ( ... continued from page #5 )

**Author's note:** This article's title "It Just Happens\*..." counters the cliché ... things just don't happen. "It" will stand for the world view one chooses to abide in. "Just" is the character of the God who wants to be our God. He has made us in His image – righteous; by faith in God. "Happens" will be the events and experiences God uses to grow our faith. All things work for the glory of God. When we turn from our ways and we look to God and live His Word – His plan for us unfolds. ~W~

### **Movie Night** **Friday, February 24 at 7:00 PM**



We show a movie once each month, in Fellowship Hall, usually on the fourth Friday. The movies shown in the past have covered a range of genres, and were usually thought provoking.

We are able to show these movies based on the church's CVLI® license. However, this license does not allow us to advertise or publicize the names of these movies to the general public, and they are always free of charge.

We usually have free snacks available, and you are also welcome to bring your own meal, if you wish (many of us do!). So, please join us for a night out at the movies!





# FEBRUARY 2023

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
			1 (††)	2 (**)	3	4
5 Communion Sunday (Note #1)	6	7	8 (††)	9 (**)	10	11
12 FCC Worship; Coffee Hour after Worship (Note #2)	13	14	15 (††)	16 (**)	17	18
19 Communion Sunday (Note #3)	20	21	22 (††)	23 (**)	24 Movie Night (Note #4)	25
26 1st Sunday of Lent; Coffee Hour after Worship (Note #5)	27	28				

**Calendar Notes:**

- #1) 2/5 — Communion Sunday: **10:27 AM.**
- #2) 2/12 — FCC Worship: **10:27 AM. ALSO:** Coffee Hour after Worship.
- #3) 2/19 — Communion Sunday: **10:27 AM.**
- #4) 2/24 — Movie Night — in Fellowship Hall: **7:00 PM.**
- #5) 2/26 — First Sunday of Lent: **10:27 AM. ALSO:** Coffee Hour after Worship.
- (††) Wednesday Bible Study: **3:00 PM** (in Fellowship Hall).
- (\*\*) Thursday afternoon prayer: **3:00 PM** (in FCC Parlor).

