



ALDERSGATE ADVOCATE

April 2024

Pastoral Letter – April 2024 “God’s Laughter”

A couple of weeks ago, I visited Vern at Lahey Hospital. He was recovering from the vascular surgery he had a day ago. As I sat next to him, he gave me a small bag with some Froot Loops. The label said, “The Seeds of Donut.” Its description said, “If you dig about ten feet deep and place these seeds, you will harvest the donuts.” I chuckled and laughed with both Vern and Betty together. I appreciated his sense of humor even when he was stuck in the hospital, dealing with pain and exhaustion.

You may notice that I often share some humorous stories during my sermons. My wife is amazed to see people at Aldersgate laugh during my sermon because she says, “When you say jokes in Korean, you are not that funny.” Well, I do not know if my English has finally gotten better than Korean. Praise God! However, I usually give thanks to God for the generosity of Aldersgate people who are willing to laugh at the poor jokes of their pastor. Thank you always for the love and care for your pastor ☺

Many people often believe that church is a place with people who are always serious about their faith and strict about the code of their behaviors. Children, don’t make noises. Strangers, don’t sit at the pew where my three generations have been sitting. Keep your straight face and present your best-self while you are at the church. After all, Reinhold Niebuhr, one of the most influential theologians in the 20th century, argued that humor does not belong to the serious business of faith when “the ultimate issues are raised.”

However, in *Divine Laughter*, the authors Karl Jacobson and Rolf Jacobson insist, “The Bible is frequently funny, and we should let it be what it is.” Despite the historical, cultural, and contextual gap between us and the people in the Bible, we often encounter stories where we can laugh at the surprise, joy, ridicule, or foolishness. When Abraham and Sarah were told they would bear a child in their old age, they laughed at the absurdity of such news or maybe out of their pain. In his duel with the prophets of Baal and Asherah, he looked at them performing a ritual for rain for hours and laughed, “Cry aloud! Maybe your god is on a vacation or sleeping.”

And there is Jesus. Although the Bible does not tell us that “Jesus laughed,” we can imagine he was smiling and laughing when the sick were healed and shared joy with their families. He was laughing when he took children “up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them” (Mark 10:16). Some people justify their rights to be angry with others, pointing to the evil and injustice in our world. They highlight how Jesus was also angry with the temple practices that exploited the poor and marginalized and overturned the tables. However, Willis Wheatley envisioned Jesus as one who laughs as he announced the good news of God’s love to

the sorrowful, disinherited, oppressed. Therefore, the title of his drawing is called “Christ, the Liberator.”

As many people will share and post jokes for April Fools’ Day, I believe that the greatest joke for the world is the resurrection of Christ. Death could not keep him in the tomb. He arose, therefore proving that “nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37). So, do not lose laughter as you face challenges, hardships, or difficulties today, especially for the sake of the gospel. Even when the powers, authorities, and principalities seem to prevail, having their claim on the lives of others, God laughs and says, “You fool! Do you really think you are in control?” (Psalm 2:4)

Pastor Bob

Wednesday Lenten Soup Supper and Service Thank You!

A big **THANK YOU** to everyone who participated in the Wednesday Lenten soup suppers and services this year. Whether you provided food, led a service, attended the supper and/or service, or watched the service, we appreciated your participation! A special thank you to Betsey Driscoll for organizing the suppers and providing her minestrone soup each week, Maylis for her music, and to those who led services: Dan Ward, Cheryl Ortolf, David Driscoll, Peter Smyton, and Christine Kelley. You each made our Lenten journey so very meaningful!

Update on Aldersgate Scholarship to Middlesex Community College

Last year, the Mighty Men’s group gave \$8000 to Middlesex Community College (MCC) to establish the Aldersgate United Methodist Church Scholarship. The scholarship’s purpose is to provide a \$1000 award each year to a BIPOC – black, indigenous, or person of color – recipient to further their education. The first AUMC Scholarship was awarded last fall to Ibrahim Konteh, a cybersecurity major. We learned that, if our scholarship fund reached \$20,000, the scholarship could be awarded annually in perpetuity since MCC’s investment account guarantees a 5% return (so \$20K earns \$1K annually). At the March Church Council meeting, the Council unanimously agreed to provide \$12,600 of the \$15,000 2023 income earned by our Endowment Fund to MCC to reach the \$20,000 goal of the scholarship fund. (See more information about the Endowment Fund elsewhere in this Advocate.) Representatives from MCC will attend worship on April 7 to receive and celebrate this gift with us.

Drivers Wanted!

We are compiling a list of people willing to drive people to church services who are unable to get to Aldersgate otherwise. If you are willing to be on such a list, please let Betsy in the office know. We will match you with people who are “on your way.” If we have enough volunteers, it would not be an “every week” commitment. Won’t you help us bring the unchurched into the fold?

Interested in Learning How to Record Worship?

We are looking to add to our friendly team of volunteers who live-stream and record our worship services. We take turns so everyone gets an opportunity to participate. We schedule the two-person crew weekly based on everyone's availability. Training is provided. If you are interested in learning more, please contact Peter Smyton (617-893-9669) or Jim Ortolfo (978-995-0614).

New Composting Bin

Aldersgate now has a curbside collection service for food scraps. The 13-gallon green compost bin is stored in the kitchen. It will be picked up by Black Earth Compost every other Wednesday. In return, we'll receive a 40-pound bag of finished compost for the garden each year. This is a great way for us to reduce our trash, diverting organic waste from the incinerator into nutrients for the soil.

What can go in the bin? There's a detailed list of acceptable items on the lid. Any food scraps are okay, including meat and dairy. Also paper products, like napkins and paper towels, that have been used with food only (not for blowing nose or cleaning with chemicals). Most paper plates, cups and plastic ware are NOT compostable. Only BPI, CMA, or OK COMPOST certified products are acceptable (see the logos on the list). **The most important thing is to keep out any contaminants, like fruit stickers, plastic, and non-certified paper products. If in doubt, stick to just food scraps.** Please "snap" the lid shut when you're finished.

Thanks for your help making Aldersgate a better steward of God's beautiful creation! If you have any questions or concerns about this new program, please see Lee Williams or another Trustee.

Earth Day Movie Discussion

In observance of Earth Day, we're planning a discussion about the documentary "A Plastic Ocean" on Saturday, April 20. If you can, please watch the documentary beforehand at your own convenience. It's available from several sources:



- Reserve the DVD from your public library
- Stream through Kanopy, a free streaming service available from your public library
- Stream free through Peacock
- Rent from Amazon Prime Video, YouTube, Google Play Movies & TV, or Apple TV

Stay tuned for more details about this movie discussion and other Earth Day activities that will help us learn ways to take better care of God's creation.

Earth Day Coffee Hour

Help us celebrate Earth Day! On Sunday, April 21, we're aiming for a zero-waste fellowship hour! We want to avoid any single-use plastic items. Everyone is encouraged to bring your own travel mug, coffee mug, or reusable water bottle. (Don't worry, we'll have real coffee cups in case you forget.)



ADULT EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

ONE

*Adult Education & Church Council Invite YOU to an **ALL-CHURCH** Conversation`*

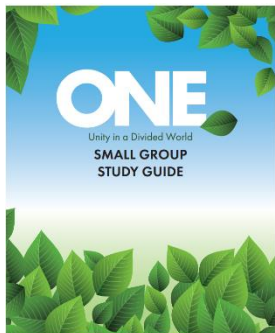
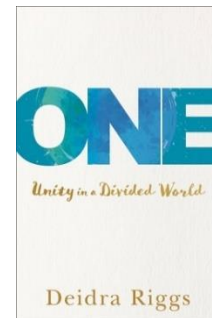
Jesus answered “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Matthew 22: 37-39

We each know and want to fulfill the Great Commandment. But what does it mean to love your neighbor as yourself? Do we have to love even if we believe different things, disagree or are polar opposites? How do we do that? How do we do it well? If we are not loving our neighbor well, are we not loving God with our whole heart?

Here at Aldersgate, we want to encourage each other to seek and find God with our whole hearts and to be His loving hands and feet. Let’s come together to explore how to love like Jesus in a world that likes to fight, cancel, and exclude those different from ourselves.

In Sunday and Thursday classes, small groups, in our homes, at church, over dinner or Zoom, let’s come together as a body for five weeks and explore these questions and grow closer in oneness and unity. We want to create an opportunity to join hearts and minds with this book looking at how the church can have unity during a time of rampant disagreement on all manner of things.

We especially would like this to be our focus this spring because General Conference meets on April 23 – May 3, and together we can pray and support Bonnie Marden and the rest of our New England delegation as they navigate some tough issues facing our denomination. It is our hope the experience of reading this book, together, will knit us closer together and deepen our church family's connections with one another, as well as spur us on to love our neighbors and love God better.



Our ONE focus will take place from April 1 to May 30.

Order a copy of the book or get one here at church, and then sign up for a discussion group. Each week we will gather to watch a short video and discuss a couple chapters. Our goal is to offer a variety of dates and times so that everyone who wants to participate can find a good time and location to join in. Some groups will have a Zoom option as well. For those who can't meet each week, we will hold a book club type discussion of the whole book.

We have three morning groups and two weeknight groups scheduled. Sign up sheets are in the lobby or reach out to the facilitators directly: Charles McCrea, Peter and Debbie Smyton, Co-hosts Dan and Kim Ward and Dawn and David Jones. More groups will be added as needed. If you would like to lead a small group, or have questions, please e-mail Kim Ward at mikdraw@aol.com. Resources – a leader's guide and videos – are available.

At the end of May, when we complete reading the book and the five weeks of discussion and study, we will celebrate together with a special event!

From the Publisher- ONE – Unity in a Divided World by Deidra Riggs. Jesus didn't say that the world would know we are his followers by our biting rhetoric, our political leanings, our charity work, or even by our knowledge of Scripture. He said the world would know us by our love for one another. Yet it's so easy to put others at arm's length, to lash out, to put up walls. Deidra Riggs wants us to put our focus on self-preservation aside and, like Jesus, make the first move toward reconciliation.

In *One*, Riggs shows readers that when Jesus offered himself up in our place, he was not only purchasing our salvation but also setting an example for us to follow. She helps readers understand that they are secure in God's inexhaustible love, making them free to love others lavishly--not just in what they *do* but in what they say, what they don't say, what they will endure, and what they will forgive.

Anyone who longs for unity in the church, in their family, and in their community will find in this book both inspiring examples of loving done well and encouragement to begin the often unnoticed hard work of building bridges with those around them.”

Women's Daytimers Breakfast Club

We meet once a month, Friday mornings at 10 am at a local restaurant for breakfast and socializing. Please contact Chantale Shepard at 978-250-9573 for more details or if you are interested in being added to the email list. We welcome new members.



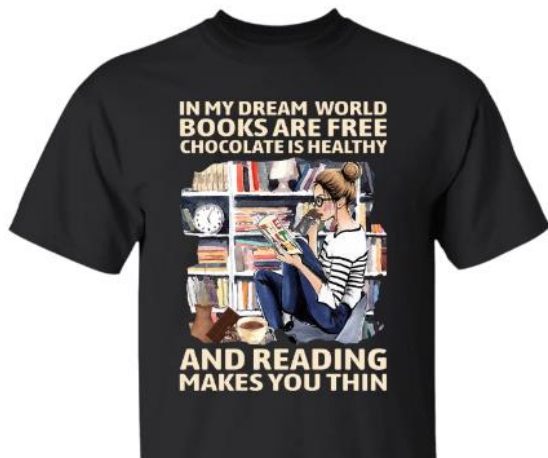
Single Ladies Dining Out

Due to the busy Easter season, Single Ladies Dining Out will have lunch together on **April 27th** (this is a change in date) at 1:00 pm at the Copper Door in Salem, NH.03079. The address is 41S Broadway. Please RSVP by Thursday Apr 25th to Betsy Campbell 978-256-9400 or by email to aldersgatehelmsford@verizon.net so that she can reserve a table large enough.

If you are a single lady and would enjoy a dinner out and lots of fun conversation, we would love to have you join us. Please talk to Betsy for more information.



Book Club in the Concord Room and on Zoom



Here are the upcoming book picks for April, May and June. If you haven't yet picked, think of your pick and let Deb know what you would like to choose.

Tuesday, April 30th, The Woman with the Cure by Lynn Cullen (Ken's Pick)

May 28 we will discuss Lessons in Chemistry by Bonnie Garmus (Judy's book).

June 25 we will discuss Happiness Falls by Angie Kim (Betsey's pick.)

Birthdays and Anniversaries – April

It has been a whole year of Celebrations for our Church Family.

We celebrate a Happy Birthday and a Happy Anniversary for the following:

When you see them, you can celebrate with them or send them a card on their special day.

April Birthdays

April 1 – Cheryl Ortolf

April 3 - Emmy's birthday

April 4 – Betty Champeaux

April 4 – Kathrine Dean

April 18 – Dawn Jones

April 19 -Mary Jean Thurlow



April Anniversaries

Apr 18- Ben Myers and Jen van Buren

If we have missed your big day, please send them by email, to Betsy in the office at aldersgetechelmsford@verizon.net or call 978-256-9400 so she can add your names and dates to the lists for the Advocates for the coming months. We can then recognize the milestones in your life and celebrate with you.

Update from the Endowment Committee

In 2023, the Endowment Fund grew by \$331,907 from gifts, interest, and market change. The balance of the Endowment Fund on December 31, 2023, was \$433,640. The Endowment Committee met on January 24, 2024, and recommended a distribution of \$15,000 which is a portion of the earnings for 2023. Per the Endowment Fund charter, these earnings may be used for missions or long-term property projects. The Finance Committee made this recommendation to the Church Council. After reviewing multiple proposals, the Council decided to use \$12,600 to fund the Aldersgate UMC Scholarship Fund at Middlesex Community College (MCC) which increases the scholarship fund to \$20,000. With this donation, the scholarship will now generate a \$1,000 per year in perpetuity to be given to a deserving BIPOC – black, indigenous, or person of color – student each fall. Representatives of MCC will be accepting this donation at the worship services on April 7. The remaining \$2,400 of the Endowment distribution will be used for a facility project identified by the Trustees at their next meeting.

At the end of July 2023, the church received a bequest of \$298,435 from the estate of Nancy Goodick which was designated to the Endowment Fund. On August 13, 2023, a special Church Conference was convened and the bequest was accepted.

Additional gifts may be made to the Endowment Fund at any time. Any gifts to the fund will make a greater long-term investment to the financial health and well-being of the missions and property of Aldersgate. We are truly blessed by the generosity of our church family!

CHURCH SCHOOL NEWS

GREEN SUNDAY!



APRIL 21ST

9:30 – 10:30 A.M.

All children and youth will come together to learn about Earth Day and how we can better love our world. We will meet outside if the weather cooperates.



Children and Youth Singing and Chime Time Schedule



This spring, we will be meeting on the following days:

Tuesday, April 9th from 5:00 – 6:00 p.m. We will have supper together and then meet for music.

Ice Cream and Sully's - Monday, April 15th at 2:00 p.m. – Families are welcome to join us at Sully's for ice cream and fellowship.

Tuesdays, May 7th & 14th from 5:00 – 6:00 p.m. We will have supper together and then practice chimes.



Confirmation Class

Please keep the following students and their mentors in your prayers during their confirmation journey:

Sarah Antonitis – David Driscoll, Cate Cruickshank – Betsey Driscoll,
Finn Hughes – Dan Ward, Gabriel Rodriguez – Lee Pender.



SAVE THE DATE!

VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL!

CHILDREN AGES 4 – 12 WEEK OF AUGUST 19TH – 23RD 9:00 - NOON

This Green VBS curriculum brings together the Bible and environmental stewardship. Children will be able to grow in faith as they play, learn, sing, and work toward renewing their congregation and community.

There are registration forms available on the welcome table downstairs. If you have any questions, or would like to help, please see Cheryl Ortolf.

Junior Youth Upcoming Events

This fellowship group is for youth in grades 5th – 7th grade

Outdoor Games Fun!

Friday, April 5th from 6:30 – 8:00 p.m. 5th – 7th grade

We will play a variety of outdoor games and make ice cream sundaes – bring a topping to share! If the weather is not good to be outside, we will play indoor games including scooter hockey.

Merrimack Valley Pavilion

Sunday, April 21st from noon – 2:00 p.m. Junior & Senior High Youth Groups

We will play mini-golf or laser tag and have ice cream! More info to follow.

Senior Youth Upcoming Events

All youth in grades 8 – 12 are welcome to join us at any time. The 7th graders will join us for some activities.

Hero

Sunday, April 7th from noon – 1:30 p.m.

Who do you consider a hero? We will make mac and cheese for lunch.

Merrimack Valley Pavilion

Sunday, April 21st from noon – 2:00 p.m. Junior & Senior High Youth Groups

We will play mini-golf or laser tag and have ice cream! More info to follow.



Wanakee Mission Trip – for youth in grades 7 - 12

Monday, July 8th – Saturday, July 12th

Watch for more details coming – save the date!

Music Notes for April Advocate

The 36th Massachusetts Spring Ring is almost here! We are excited to have eleven Aldersgate ringers joining the massed performances this year.

When:

Saturday, April 6, 2024

Where:

Tewksbury Memorial High School
320 Pleasant Street
Tewksbury, MA

Concert Time:

3:00 PM-4:30 PM

The Spring Ring is an annual event sponsored by Handbell Musicians of America that offers handbell ringers and choirs an opportunity to come together to ring and build skills. This year's guest clinician is Griff Gall, the founding artistic director of Boston's *Back Bay Ringers*.

The day culminates with a concert that is open to the public. It is a wonderful opportunity for you to come and see the beauty and excitement of handbell ringing, and to support our own ringers!

Looking forward to seeing you at this year's Spring Ring!

2024 Spring Ring Clinician



GRIFF GALL is the founding artistic director of the Back Bay Ringers, of Boston, MA. He earned a Bachelor of Music degree in music education from Westminster Choir College and completed his Level III Orff Schulwerk training through Boston University while earning his Master of Music in Education. He has presented workshops in handbell pedagogy, conducting, and Orff Schulwerk at local and national handbell and music education conferences, and is coauthor of *Ring, Dance, Play: First Experiences with Choir chimes and Orff Schulwerk*, published by GIA. Mr. Gall is an elementary music and movement specialist in Danvers, MA, and is an approved movement instructor for the American Orff Schulwerk Association. He is the recipient of the Donna Nagel Award for his contributions to the field of General Music from the

Massachusetts Music Educators Association and the Spotlight Award from the American Center for Elemental Music and Movement.

OUTREACH...

Reminder to schedule your appointment for the Blood Drive – April 20th from 9-2

Please sign up if you can help this important cause. There continues to be a national shortage!

Please call 1-800-RED CROSS (1-800-733-2767) or visit RedCrossBlood.org and search under February 24th to schedule an appointment.

For more information call or email Cate Lehan or Robin Dye or the church office.

Blessings, Outreach.

Change for Change

Change for Change continues to contribute to others. In the fall, our youth selected the Alzheimer's Association as a candidate. \$400 has been collected by change and will be donated. Our Adult ED team has selected the Alternative House in Lowell as our next candidate. Change matters. God is Good.

From Kim – Chair of Adult Ed

“Adult Ed would like the next Change for Change designation to go to Alternative House in Lowell, a domestic violence shelter. We'd love the announcement to include a logo, their slogan "There is no excuse for abuse" and link to the website.” <https://www.alternative-house.org/>



**HI! WE'RE
ALTERNATIVE
HOUSE**

ABOUT US:

Founded in 1978, we provide services to ALL survivors of domestic violence as well as their families and friends

Our services are FREE & CONFIDENTIAL

We are available 24/7, 365

We offer shelter, support groups, restraining order assistance and more

More info via the link in our bio!

CONTACT :
info@alternative-house.org / 1-888-291-6228



Dear Aldersgate family,

Thank You, Thank You, Thank You!

We just want to thank all of those who supported and participated in Chuck Piper's memorial service Saturday March 16th. It was quite an extraordinary, love-felt and moving experience for the entire Piper family! While it had its moments of joy and sorrow, it was a wonderful way to pay tribute to Chuck (dad)! Your support and love, "The church with a warm heart!", speaks volumes for who Aldersgate is as a congregation!

Thank you!

Love, Jean, Chuck Jr., Jeff, Greg, Lisa and the rest of the family!

Special thanks to Jane who was able to take the basket flowers, break them down and redistribute them to other church members in need! Bravo Jane!!

