

A weekly collection of news, reflections and announcements from the
Congregational Church of West Medford
an Open and Affirming Congregation of the United Church of Christ



PASTORAL REFLECTION

*After these things God tested Abraham. God said to him, "Abraham!"
And he said, "Here I am."
—Genesis 21:1-2*

Here I Am. Seriously, God?

UGGHHHH! Last week I wrote of the hard-to-hear-story of Hagar and Ishmael's banishment being sandwiched between Isaac's birth and near sacrifice story and here we are, one week later facing this awful text that Christians call "the sacrifice of Isaac" and Jewish folk call "the akedah" (the "binding" of Isaac). This text has engendered heated debate over the centuries—and most pastors either skip over it or face it with at minimum, trepidation if not outright fear and trembling. Is it a story of an abusive God, a misguided Abraham, religious violence at its worst? Or is it a story of faith and obedience?

Perhaps the easiest route (taken by many commentators) and a likely explanation—is to argue that it is simply an etiological tale about the shift from human sacrifice, which was practiced in some cultures of the time, to animal sacrifice. Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible child sacrifice (e.g. Leviticus 18:21; Jeremiah 7:30-34; Ezekiel 20:31) was expressly forbidden. As one commentator said, anytime one considers this text, one must say that God does *not* demand child sacrifice; indeed, that God abhors it (as evidenced by the prophets).

As awful as this story is (for a hundred reasons upon which I do not have time to reflect) there is a lot that can be mined from its depths. When I sat down to write this post, I was really moved by and drawn to the first verse of the story. "*After these things God tested Abraham...and he said, 'Here I am.'*"

Maybe I just did not want to go on reading the really hard parts of this story and identifying with the Pain of the parent Abraham, or the silence of the leader Abraham, or the confusion of the follower

Abraham—who was asked to put his own stuff on the back burner as he followed God's seemingly

insane directions. "*After these things God tested Abraham...and he said, 'Here I am.'*" What is it about Abraham's simple response, 'Here I am' that captured my heart this morning? Perhaps it is because of the church's vision and our sense of being called out. Perhaps it is because of a sense of having been through a testy time these last many months—as we have done the deep work of listening for God's call on our community and on us as individuals to seek God's will and not our own. 'Here I am.'



...continued next page

I find my heart-aching as I write, and my mind whispering that schmaltzy, but-favorite-of-so-many song, “Here I Am, Lord. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bryEXPELAYg> (I must admit having now listened for a few moments I remember why it is not one of my favorites...)

But here is a really helpful theological observation—for anyone considering this story and for we who are boldly stepping out from our past into a future into which we believe God is calling us filled with fear and trembling. As Abraham picks up the knife to make the sacrifice of his beloved child, the LORD speaks, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me” (22:12). “Now I know.” Now I know, God says.

One commentator suggests that this story *“does not subscribe to later notions of God’s perfect omniscience. This is a genuine test, and Abraham is free to decide what he will do. God neither knows nor pre-ordains how Abraham will respond. Reading this story with a hermeneutic of generosity, one could argue that God imposes this one-time test on Abraham because God has risked everything on this one man, and God needs to know if he is faithful”* (Ellen Davis in her book *Getting Involved With God: Rediscovering the Old Testament* (Cowley, 2001) 50-64).

Abraham was not a perfect ‘faither’ as this part of his story would suggest—he blew it a few times before this moment—think the wife-sister-charade; and banishing Hagar and Ishmael because of Sarah’s jealousy. Yet, when push came to shove and it was about God’s call on his life, Abraham seems to be willing to give up the thing most precious to him in all the world for the sake of being faithful to the God who gave him that gift in the first place. And then, God provided—the sacrifice, the relief, the correction, the Lamb. And Abraham was able to breathe again, for there on that mountain ‘The Lord Provides.’

“Here I am”, he said throughout his life and throughout this story. “Here I am.” If we allow it, despite the horror with which we consider it, this ancient story of the ‘Sacrifice of Isaac’ makes a claim on us. Everything that we are, everything that we have, our lives and the lives of those most precious to us, belong to the very Creator who gave them to us. As well, this story of the akedah assures us that God will provide, that God will be present. Here I am, indeed.

Beloved, if we believe that God bet it all on Abraham and his descendants who were chosen to bless the whole world (Genesis 12:3); then we can believe that God is betting it all on us as well, for we too are called and chosen to bless the world. May we face our future knowing that we and that for which we are called belong to God and that whether we are up on the mountaintops, down in the valleys, ensconced in our sanctuary, exposed in a flower shop or dancing in the streets—the Lord Provides.

Rev. Wendy Miller Olapade

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IN OUR PRAYERS AND PASTORAL CARE



Concerns: We pray for Charlotte's mother and all who find themselves losing friends later in life; for the loneliness that elders often experience; for those who continue in their studies and are preparing for finals; for Brenda who has been ill this week; for Joy for relief from foot pain; for Rev. Wendy's father Philip for healing from cancer; for Ernestine S. and her family as she transitions to nursing care; a member of Karen's family; the many emotions we are experiencing as a congregation as we move forward with our bold decision.

We continue to pray for all affected by gun violence in our country—including the perpetrators; for June L. for strength, courage and recovery; for Kim G. and her family for strength for the challenge of caring for June; for Thelma T. recuperating and moving to Arlington Sunrise; for Eva W. at home; Kathy W. in her prison work; patience for all who are working so hard on our transition; for God to make a way for reconciliation where there seems to be no way; all who struggle with addictions; Tom C. for relief from chronic neck pain; Sheila in treatment; a brother Paul and his wife's struggles; those caring for the elderly; Dick S's friend Ed who will seek a nursing home while his housemate goes in for surgery.

Joys: We praise God for our music ministry; the season of commencement, our own HS graduates Emma and Patrick, our middles school-ers, AJ, Drew and Tripp, Amanda's masters and others; for fathers everywhere; in gratitude for the wonderful circumstances in which Joy's parents have arrived; we pray in gratitude for a hopeful prognosis for Rev. Wendy's dad; gratitude and travelling mercies for Louise's trip to National History Competition in Washington; Drew and Tripp's grandmother's summer visit; our small team and the UCCs presence in the Pride Parade; the MACUCC Annual Meeting; the installations of Kent French and Jason Donnelly to new ministries; our future; all who are graduating and moving on; the courage with which we are facing the future and the hand God has had in it all.

We continue to pray for Charlene's family as they walk with her brother Lou who is in hospice care; all in recovery; for all those struggling with cancer, addiction and Alzheimer's; for the environment; for President Obama and Congress regarding our present times of strife—may God's intentions prevail as they make decisions; for our beloved elders at home: Eva W., June L., Thelma T., Tom C. We remember fallen soldiers, Veterans and those serving in our military. We lift up all of the children of our congregation and those we bless in Bright Stars. ***Please send requests to office@medfordchurch.org by noon Wed.***

Pastoral Care Concerns: The Deacon of the Month for June is Brenda Briggs who can be reached at bgbriggs51@gmail.com. The Deacon of the month for July is Ose Manheim who can be reached at photose@comcast.net. Please let the deacon of the month know if there is someone who could use a visit, phone call, card, or prayer. The Deacons (aka: Spiritual Life) rely on your input about the well being and needs of our members and friends. Rev. Wendy can be reached: revwdmiller@comcast.net.



OUR CHURCH ANNOUNCEMENTS

Fellowship Hour Help Needed: Can you bring some goodies to support our fellowship time? Karen McCune Barca has take on the organization of this beloved time—and all are welcome to help. Please be in touch with her about signing up for a Sunday to bring snacks! Immediate help needed for summer Sundays. Please contact Karen (karenmccunebarca@gmail.com).

Worship Volunteers Always Welcome: We are always looking for folk to participate in worship as ushers and readers. Youth and Children are always welcomed to participate. The Spiritual Life Committee recruits readers. Ose Manheim and Julie Roberts are the contacts at this time. You are also welcome to call the church office to volunteer.

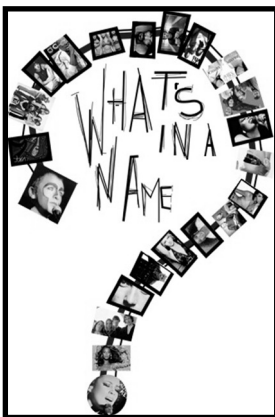
Altar Flowers Always Welcomed: Please contact Brenda Briggs bgbriggs51@gmail.com (or the church office@medfordchurch.org) to make arrangements to schedule a Sunday to bring flowers or order them in honor or memory of a loved one.

Happy June Birthdays

- 28 Constance Wescott
- 29 Jessica Coughlin

Happy July Birthdays

- 7 John Maloney
- 10 Louise Wilensky
- 28 Jamie Hutchinson
- 28 Jennafer Hutchinson
- 30 Mary Beal
- 31 Stephen Baker



Do you have any wild ideas for our new name?

Guided by experts in branding and the wisdom of people experienced at planting new ministries, we will soon enter into a deliberate process to decide about things like our church's new name/brand and how and when and where we will worship...but in the meanwhile... we welcome your ideas!

Many of you will be travelling this summer and we encourage you to be on the lookout for images and ideas that might be good for us too. Watch for church names and words in the world that evoke images of the vision to which we believe God has called us... remember the words from the shared values and the vision (see page 4 and 5 of this document:

<http://medfordchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/2014.04.13-Draft-Proposal-to-Congregation-for-Bold-Decision-for-Ministry.pdf>)

Send your ideas to Rev. Wendy with "What's in a name" in the subject line; you know the address: revwdmiller@comcast.net

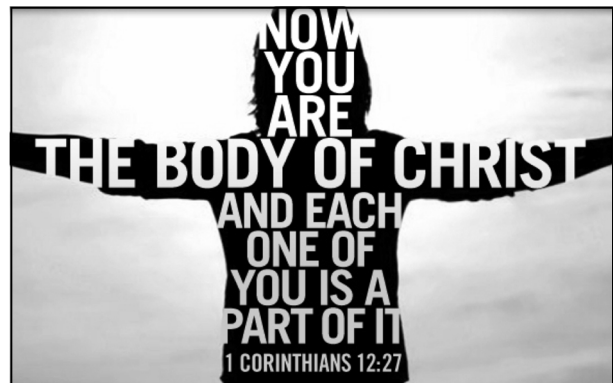
Report from the Church Council About Our Ministry and our Future

Church Council met Wednesday, June 25 and made several important decisions about the future which will keep us moving forward! These include the confirmation of spending that the congregation approved at the June 1 meeting.

We wanted to let you know about these big steps forward asap!

- As of Sunday, October 5, 2014 our 10 am Sunday Worship will move to the new ministry center at 458 High Street, Medford. We will continue to worship there on Sundays at 10 am until further notice. We will begin a deliberate congregational conversation about worship and music models that are called out of our vision, but will not try to complete that over the summer. That conversation will consider both the worship hopes and expectations of our current members, and those of the people who we seek to do ministry with who are not yet here; and we will prioritize the needs and preferences of those who are not yet here.
- Church Council approved a partnership arrangement with Rev. Tom Hathaway for a 5 Month "Consulting Contract" (July, Sept-Dec, 2014) to work with our congregation in three ministries areas. These include in partnership with North Prospect Union a) new, web based faith formation ministry; b) youth ministry and c) Mission and Justice Ministries. The proposal, Tom's CV/Statement on Ministry and other details can be found here: <http://medfordchurch.org/ministry-partnership-with-rev-tom-hathaway-and-north-prospect-union-ucc/>
- Church council affirmed initial spending for Construction and Furnishings for the church offices and ministry center in the amount of \$ 25,000.00. The design of the secure, air conditioned and handicap accessible space includes: a small office for the pastor, a church office, a small hospitality area with refrigerator and microwave, a handicap accessible restroom, a large basement storage area and a multipurpose meeting/gathering space which will seat 40 in cushioned "church chairs". Further proposals are forthcoming for the costs associated with high quality Audio Visual System, Keyboard for worship, exterior signage and computer and other electronic upgrades. Watch for an invitation in mid July to take a field trip to the new digs!!
- Church council commissioned a By Law Team to address a new church organizational model and a complete revision of our bylaws—with the objective of being completed by Sept 1 and voted upon at a meeting of the governing body on Sept. 14. 2014.
- Church Council was advised that the sale of the building is progressing and is still scheduled to complete on September 30, 2014.

**Save the Date:
Sunday, August 24
10 am Worship &
Picnic Brunch
at the Parsonage**



What Gifts Might you Bring to Our Move to the New Ministry Center?

My Pennsylvania Dutch Poppop always said, “Many hands make light work!” and we are ready to start planning and doing the preparations for our move out of 400 High Street and the “nesting” of 458 High Street. We are wondering how you might get involved?

Our history team (Kathy W, Julie, Elizabeth, and others) have been about the process of going through all of our historical documentation and “secret” rooms to secure and store that which should be saved and dispose of that which should not. What a blessing!!



But as we head toward the actual move of Rev. Wendy's office, the church office and the things we will take with us for our worship life there remains much to do. As well, we are shopping for and making decisions about the furnishings and equipment needed for the new ministry center!

Volunteers Needed to:

- Shopping for office furniture, chairs, tables, for ministry center—immediately
- Shopping for Signage—immediate
- Leading/Working with team to decide on AV System for ministry center—immediately
- Packing books and hymnals in late July and early August
- Work with Staff to vetting, dispose and pack church office file drawers—July and August
- Packing worship goods—September
- Packing Office Equipment—August

While we are expecting to contract for the construction of our ministry center, there are some things that could be done by church members if there is energy and passion. It could be fun and will certainly add to the investment we experience in our space.

Possible DIY Projects include:

- Painting the Interior of the Center
- Building Storage (IKEA?)—bookshelves for offices and basement storage
- Building Furnishings—pastors desk, church office desk and credenza
- Cleaning and Refinishing existing solid wood storage hutch for our office storage and work center
- *Your idea...*



MISSION AND OUTREACH



The Lakota Sewing Circle in So. Dakota has donated a Star Quilt for us to raffle. The purpose of the raffle is raise funds to cover the shipping costs of all the sewing materials generously given and to be sent to the Pine Ridge Fund.

Tickets are \$10 each or 3 for \$20. Please contact Joy Harris at brujoy2@comcast.net.

<https://www.facebook.com/LakotaSewingCircle> As well as
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aC64PK14pCc&list=UUcOHBWkJea6ssmyl_wk-5A&feature=share

Joy Harris is organizing a group to attend the Mashpee Wampanoag Pow Wow—either July 4th or July 5th. We will car-pool to the event. Those interested please contact Joy at brujoy2@comcast.net.

Outdoor Church
Sandwich Making
TODAY—Sunday, June 29
In the Kitchen after Worship
Contact Elizabeth Bennett via reianfans@yahoo.com



93RD ANNUAL MASHPEE WAMPANOAG POWWOW

JULY 4-6 2014

BARNSTABLE COUNTY FAIR GROUNDS
1220 NATHAN ELLIS HIGHWAY, EAST FALMOUTH

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| This year's theme is "Honoring our Waterways" | Host Drum - Stoney Creek Emcee - Earl "Chieftie" Mills Jr. Head Judge - Toni Weeden Head Drum Judge - Darryl Wixon Arena Director - Russell Peters Jr. | Head Dancers: Cameron Greendeer (Ho-chunk Nation) Nitana Hicks (Mashpee Wampanoag) Fireball - Saturday, July 5 th , at dusk |
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\$35,000 in prizes

Open to the public - Adults \$13 | Children ages 6 to 12/elders 65+ \$8 | Children 5 and under free

INFORMATION: WWW.MASHPEEWAMPANOAGTRIBE.COM | (508) 477-0208 EXT. 163

Remembering Stonewall: June 26, 1969 25th Anniversary

Along with the world, we take a moment to remember the blessed act of civil disobedience known as the Stonewall riots. These were a series of spontaneous, violent demonstrations by members of the gay community against a police raid that took place in the early morning hours of June 28, 1969, at the Stonewall Inn in the Greenwich Village neighborhood of New York City.

This moment in our countries history is widely considered to constitute the single most important event leading to the modern fight for LGBTQ rights in the United States. In the 1950s and 1960s, LGBTQ Americans faced legal system more anti-homosexual than those of some Warsaw Pact countries and very few establishments welcomed them. The police often raided those that did. According to Wikipedia, The Stonewall Inn, owned by the Genovese Mafia family, catered to an assortment of patrons and was known to be popular among the poorest and most marginalized people in the gay community: drag queens, representatives of a newly self-aware transgender community, effeminate young men, male prostitutes, and homeless youth.

The police lost control of their standard 'gay bar' raid practice and this became the historical moment that the LGBTQ community said, "We're not taking it anymore." The history and article at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stonewall_riots is helpful reminder of the sacrifices suffered, the progress that has been made, and the work yet to be done for justice and equality in our world. We pray God's blessings on all who are remembering Stonewall this weekend and we thank God for the activism and courage that came out of that moment.

