

Over the years, I have asked many of you to stand up here and share your story. You have willingly accepted the challenge and have spoken from your heart. At the recent church council meeting we were discussing how we would arrange our summer worship services as Pastor Doug had planned vacations before he came to be with us. At the council meeting we read and talked about the scripture passage that Liz has just read. We reflected on the kingdom of God in our midst. I decided that it was my turn to share my thoughts with you. I have known so many of you for a long time and we have done many things together. We have become an extended family of varied ages who come from many different traditions and who have different points of view. What I like is that we are able to work together when the need arises.

I was raised in a two parent home in the Boston area and we attended a Congregational church almost every Sunday. My first experience doing something for someone I did not know was in Sunday school. I was six or seven years old. Around the Thanksgiving season, our Sunday school class received brown bags with a picture of a little girl crying-this was from the Home for Little Wanderers, an orphanage in the area. The message was "I am hungry-can you help me." I made sure my Mom filled the bag and I brought it back the following Sunday. I really never knew what it was to go hungry, and I did not want that little girl to suffer. The amount of can goods on the table the next Sunday in our classroom amazed me. It surprised me that almost everyone helped and we did not know who we were helping. Over the years, I continued to do activities with my parents that helped other people.

When I went away to college I decided that I wanted to live my life differently. I "threw away" at least for the moment everything I had learned in my first 18 years of life. I stayed away from church for quite a few years, it just wasn't cool. I finished college and was married.

Life was not going well for me. One Christmas Eve in the early 1970's, I came to services here. The Rev Jim Edmondson, John's dad was the minister. I sat on a side pew and just listened to familiar words and songs. People were friendly and kind. I liked it that people who did not know me came over and spoke to me. I decided to come back again, - again and again. I was offered opportunities to do little things to help others. "Could you make coffee next Sunday? Would you like to come to the Ladies Guild meeting? I tried each activity. I began to feel better. Each activity was a learning experience for me. I participated in the CROP WALK, that program that helps to feed hungry people. I helped with church dinners and with the Christmas Fair.

At one point I was asked to teach Sunday school. Yikes! Now that was a really big step. Although I did grow up in a church, I did not really think much about the Bible, Jesus' message or even God. To me at that time, God was an old man dressed in a gray robe up in the clouds. So you see from this, I was really only one lesson ahead of the kids. I was afraid I would forget the words of the Lord's Prayer so I wrote them down. Exploring my faith with the children taught me so much. I really came to know the God of my understanding. I began to own my own faith and use it in my everyday life. It has been a slow process.

As we have worked together helping others, it has also helped me. I have really appreciated the chances I have had to plan and work with you on projects. It has opened my eyes to the possibility that we can accomplish together something that I could not do alone. Work is fun- particularly when we complete something we thought we could not do.

A recent experience that made this real was when Pastor Michael said we, the First Congregational Church of Haddam had been asked to set up an apartment for a man who had been homeless for a very long time.

I was doubtful that we could accomplish this-but I think it was Mike

Battistoni who said at the council meeting “ Of course we can do that”- so with organization skills of Cindy Nicastro and many others and the help of practically the entire congregation, in a few weeks this man had a new apartment -furnished and ready to live in. There was even homemade cookies on the table. I understand he is still doing very well. What an amazing adventure.

As spring approached this year, I began to wonder how we would be able to continue the bread ministry started by Pastor Michael. He had retired and a couple of the regular helpers would not be able to be a part of this ministry this year. This project was talked about at Church Council and an OPPORTUNITY sheet was place on the bulletin board in the Fellowship Hall. Several of you signed up to help. I am so happy that you did. We did the trial run for baking the bread for the Tag Sale. It was successful.

Now there are people who come to mix the bread on Thursday. The yeast is the beginning of the bread. The other ingredients are added and mixed. The dough rests in the refrigerator overnight. On Friday, 4 or 5 people come to make the loaves, set them to rise, and bake them. Later in the afternoon, other folk come to put the bread in bags, and bring it to the market to sell it; So far, we have spent about \$200 on ingredients that should allow us to make bread for most of the summer. In the fall as a result of all of your caring and helping we should be able to give the Haddam Fuel Bank about \$2500. Who knows what can happen when we work together. Maybe the world will be a little bit better.

In my life I have learned that when I am feeling a bit down and useless, if I do something for someone else I will begin to feel better. It could just be a phone call, or sending a card, or reaching for something for someone in the grocery store. The end result is that I do feel better.

On Children's Sunday, the children talked about what they had done for someone else. So many activities were listed-I was touched particularly by this year's mission project that will help a young family in our town. The mother has been very sick. With the miracles of modern medicine she is making progress and feeling better. Our church family is helping our kids learn a lifelong lesson-when we work together we can accomplish many things.

The kingdom of God is made real, when the yeast of service is in the mix.