

Sabbatical Soundbite #4

Each week, between now and February 7th, the Sabbatical Team will put out a brief description of one aspect of the sabbatical time that our church is entering in 2016. This is the fourth of these notes to keep you updated and informed about the rich opportunities that lie ahead for us as a congregation. (5th including Rev. Dr. Christine Fontaine's bio)

The Facts Christian Theological Seminary asked for grant proposals to be coherent, well integrated and carry through a theme. Our common theme in our proposal, for both Pastor Barb and the church, was renewal through the Sacred Journey. This journey will be shaped by our visioning work and influenced by the story found in *Traveling with Pomegranates*.

Each sabbatical activity was chosen to be spiritually nourishing for the participants. Some of the activities will be open to members of the community as well as the church. The activities will provide stimulation, enrichment, and regeneration through exposure to sacred art and architecture, spending time in nature, traveling to new places and having new worship experiences. We will embody the experience of walking a labyrinth, not exactly knowing where we are going but trusting that the process of traveling this path together will result in new strength and inspiration for our church.

The Joy Coming together for any purpose can be joyful but coming together with a spiritual purpose is especially stimulating. This week a number of people will begin reading the book that inspired Pastor Barb's sabbatical journey. In this small group activity we will explore the theme of renewal, spiritual growth and ideas around the divine feminine. We will also touch upon the idea of the Black Madonna and what place Mother Mary has in our own faith journey as well as the story of the greater church.

What's Next? Why the Black Madonna, why Mary, why icons?

Questions? Please see anyone of the sabbatical team members: Dave Hanson, Janet Andrews, Beth Marshall, Lu Anne Herrick or Pastor Barb. Also please feel free to borrow the sabbatical notebook to review all aspects of the grant process and award.

Rev. Dr. Christine Neiffer Fontaine is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ and a trained Intentional Interim through the Interim Ministry Network. She has served churches in both Michigan and Massachusetts.

Pastor Chris was born and raised in Southeastern Pennsylvania where she attended the same Evangelical and Reformed Church where her mother and maternal grandmother were members. Having spent much of her adult life in Congregational Churches in New England, she considers herself lucky to have experienced both sides of the merger that made the United Church of Christ.

Christine earned a Master of Divinity from Andover Newton Theological School and a Doctor of Ministry in Preaching from Chicago Theological Seminary. She earned her B.A. in Economics at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst.

Prior to her call to ministry, her first career was as a Cytotechnologist, diagnosing cancer, with training at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital in Philadelphia and Pennsylvania State University. After seven years at a microscope, she felt called to work with disadvantaged and incarcerated adolescents as a direct care worker and office manager. Since the mid 1980s, Christine has been a public storyteller. She has worked in elementary schools for Massachusetts Special Arts and has performed for churches, women's groups and at women's retreats. She has led Biblical Storytelling workshops at Annual Meetings of the Massachusetts and Michigan Conferences.

Having survived paralytic polio at the age of seven she has always had a passion for the rights of the disabled and has led workshops on Scripture and Disability. She is an avid quilter, knitter and reader. She has started several prayer shawl ministries and made quilts for babies in the neonatal unit of the local hospital. Every year she contributes baby and school kits to Church World Service.

She has two adult children, Kelli and Curtis, and three cats.