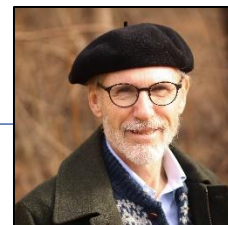


## First Congregational Church Weekly Newsletter

East Longmeadow, MA

September 18, 2024



### Pastoral Reflection from Rev. Thomas Hawkins

A year ago last August, I received a phone call from East Longmeadow asking if I'd be interested in serving as a three-month Bridge Pastor beginning in October, 2023. The Deacons wanted some continuity between early October when their pastor was retiring and Christmas/Epiphany season. I had no idea how this phone call would lead to me serving not just three months but twelve months as your Bridge Pastor.

It is with a heart full of gratitude and grief, love and hope, that I am now leaving you. I will miss all of you dearly. And, as Paul said in his letter to the Philippians, I will thank God every time I remember you.

I will remember the conversations and laughter shared with you during coffee fellowship. I will remember the awe I experienced at East Longmeadow's Christmas Tree lighting and the tables full of cookies and hot chocolate that followed. I will remember Santa Claus and children lined up to sit on his lap so that proud parents could take their pictures. I will recall my amazement at a crowded Christmas Craft Fair and everyone's enthusiasm at the spring Plant Sale (and the blue bells and iris I brought home that day will remind me of you every spring when they bloom). And how could I forget Food Truck Saturday when everyone sprang into action to save the food vendor's pop-up tent when a violent thunderstorm interrupted the event. I will remember the candle-lit Christmas Eve service when every pew filled. I will carry with me so many images of your astounding generosity as you collected winter coats for the needy, or food for Kensington School, or personal items for the YWCA's women's programs. And I will hold forever in my heart all those people whom I walked alongside as they went through difficult times and was a witness their incredible strength, resilience, and deep faith.

Most of all, Jan and I will remember the love we hold for each of you. I have been blessed to have had the opportunity to spend these last 12 months serving alongside all of you.

Transitions are never easy. And goodbyes always feel too soon. Amid this transition for you as a congregation, I am confident that God will do what God does best. I am certain that God will continue to guide you all with grace in the coming months and years. You have excellent leaders and dedicated people who love God and express that love through serving the East Longmeadow Congregational Church. I want to especially thank Cindy Koziol and Deb Salli, who as the staff members with whom I worked closely made my work so much easier and productive. Any success I have had among you is largely the result of their support and hard work. This is a strong, confident congregation with leaders who work well with each other and whom the congregation knows and trusts. Finally, although Jan and I are leaving you, we promise to hold you in our prayers long after our good-byes.

Our last Sunday with you will be October 6. Between now and then, we will have an opportunity to say farewell to each other.

Blessings,  
Thomas R. Hawkins

**SUNDAY WORSHIP** in the sanctuary or livestream link: <http://www.facebook.com/churchontherotary/>

**MUSIC NEWS** 🎵

We welcome you to join us as we worship in song. Rehearsals are Sunday after service. Give it a try!!

## PILLOWCASES

We are in need of gently used pretty, **printed** pillowcases that you no longer need and are willing to donate. We plan to turn them into pretty dresses for little girls in Africa, like the one pictured that Terrie deLiefde recently made. Please leave it in the basket in the church library. Let us know if you would like to help with the simple sewing. Thanks so much. M&O

## MODERATOR'S NOTE

Greetings!

As many have heard, we are still in the process of finding a settled part time pastor through our Search Committee.

In the meantime, as a normal course of business during a search, we utilize the temporary Bridge Ministry format until a settled pastor joins us. We have been blessed with having the Rev. Thomas Hawkins, and his wife Jan, as part of our church family for nearly a year! They came along after Rev. Carrie Bail retired last October to fill the role in Bridge Ministry and we all are very thankful that God brought us together.

As we move forward, Sunday, October 6, will be the last worship service with Thomas in the pulpit. Please join me for Coffee Hour on October 6 for a Thank You celebration as we send them off to continue their retirement. We wish them all the blessings and joys in their travel and family adventures!

As we continue on our journey, the Deacons have chosen the next Bridge Minister, Rev. Denise Terry, who will begin her duties on October 9, at the Deacons meeting. Please join me in welcoming Rev. Terry at her first worship service with us on October 13. Rev. Terry brings a wealth of experience having served in many roles over the years, as Settled, Temporary, Interim and now Bridge Ministry. I will leave a more detailed biography up to her for the newsletter, the following week.

We are blessed with an active congregation, who work to serve ministry and missions in many ways, and this does not go unnoticed by those within our church family and throughout the community. Thank you all for your time, talent and treasure because serving together is what makes the load lighter! Be well and enjoy this amazing Fall weather!

Peace,  
Olan

## PRAYER CONCERNS

- For Rick recovering from a procedure

## PRAYER

Holy One, you demonstrate your power and might through showing mercy and compassion to all. Pour upon us the abundance of your grace and giving us strength to persevere with steadfast faith amid the joys and sorrows of life. Grant that we may run without stumbling the race that is set before us. Amen.



First Congregational Church

7 Somers Road, East Longmeadow, MA 01028

Web: [churchontherotary.org](http://churchontherotary.org) ~ email: [office@churchontherotary.org](mailto:office@churchontherotary.org) ~ 413.525.4121