

May 12, 2022

Dear Friends –

I remember the first time I experienced it: I was in my final year of seminary and serving as an intern at Old South Church in Boston. The Rev. Dr. Nancy Taylor, the Senior Minister, came up to the pulpit after a particularly moving piece of music, and declared, “God is Good!” Without missing a beat, the congregation responded joyfully, “All the time!”



Perhaps this is a refrain you have experienced often, but for me it was the first time I had heard it pronounced that way, and to such an effect: it was a joyful, collective celebration, born of an understanding that it is essential to stop and recognize the truly beautiful moments. That regardless of what is happening in the world, or in our lives, God IS good. Like Love, there is no Good without God, for God is goodness itself. In the beginning was the good, and the good was with God, and the good was God.

I have had a similar experience this past week – one that forced me to stop, to recognize that God is Good. *All the time*. As many of you know, the last piece of my pregnancy and preparation has been narrowing down, with the Deacons and Trustees, the Parental Leave Pastor for my time away – rapidly approaching. As with the last time, I thought I was being very clever and proactive in planning the timing (as much as that is ever possible), to be away during summer as folks begin to be away visiting family, friends, and beautiful Vermont lakes. It is a slower season in the church, and a joyful one – a relatively easy and joyful time for someone to step into, right?

There were only two problems, as I found out. The first is that our visioning project, in information-gathering phase for a while, has moved excitedly into the next phase – wheels on the ground planning for our different visions for the future. And the other problem? Well, have you ever thought about trying to convince someone to give UP their spectacular Vermont summer to shepherd a congregation? But God is good. And not only did someone step up – it the **right** person. Someone who makes me say, and honestly feel, that you will likely be in *better* hands this summer than if I were going to be present – The Rev. Joan O’Gorman.

Joan is no stranger to this congregation, of course, but a trusted friend. In fact, she was the last person to preach before my first Sunday with you, in April of 2019! Many of you know she is a gifted preacher and chaplain, but did you know that she has worked extensively as an interim? That previous congregations she has served have undergone similar Visioning work as First is undergoing now, under similar circumstances, to miraculous – sacred – effect?

Rev. O’Gorman did not take the call lightly, understanding this is a unique time in our congregation’s life. (Why? Check out our Visioning page [here](#). And make sure to attend the zoom meeting after worship to start brainstorming proposals!) She approached her discernment as just that – discernment – to ascertain whether this was, indeed, a call. Each question she has asked in the process has brought me closer to the proclamation with which I began this letter – God is *so good* friends. Joan is precisely the right person to guide us *all* in these times – as pastor, teacher, and friend. Please see her full biography below my signature!

To this end, Joan will join us in worship on June 5, which will be final Sunday before my parental leave. She will lead or coordinate worship throughout June, July and August, with the exception of

the last two weeks in June when she will be on a much-deserved vacation. Outside of worship, she will work primarily with the Trustees, and be available to them as they help guide us through our proposal-writing process this summer. She will also, of course, be available for emergency pastoral care needs, to be referred by staff and members of our Partners in Pastoral Care team – who we will introduce more fully as we get closer, along with information on how to best be in touch with Joan during this time. The plan is for me to return on September 4th, to lead worship jointly with her, before returning to work the following week.

In her own words, Joan would like to say, “thank you to the congregation for this invitation and sacred trust to be part of the ministry of this beloved congregation. I feel honored to serve.” In return, I know you will join me in feeling honored that she accepted the call, and of course, in answering the refrain: God is Good!

All the time.

In faith,



[The Rev. Elissa Johnk](#), Lead Minister

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**The Rev. Joan Newton O’Gorman** is an ordained pastor in the United Church of Christ, and has served congregations in Vermont for the past 35 years in both settled and interim ministries. She is a Hospice and Palliative Care Chaplain with the University of Vermont Health Network Home Health and Hospice.

Joan is grateful for the many spiritual communities that have nurtured her: Roman Catholic beginnings, Quaker meeting, Unitarian Universalist fellowship and Buddhist teachings.

Before entering ministry, Joan put herself through Hunter College by driving a taxi in New York City, taught language arts in a small school in rural Maine, and served as Director of MAPS, Maine Adoption Placement Service. She is a graduate of Bangor Theological Seminary.



Joan is married to Gary who is a UCC Licensed Lay Pastor and has served churches in Vermont for over 15 years. They have four children - two live in Vermont and two live in California - which makes life interesting. One grandchild lives in Vermont and one in California which makes it even more interesting. Joan enjoys hiking, kayaking, camping, reading and cooking.