

Burn Brighter  
Stewardship Theme 2021  
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At the time of this campaign, South Congregational Church and First Congregational Church had voted to form a new congregation – Granby Congregational Church. The effective date of the merger was January 1, 2023. In the fall of 2022, both congregations were worshipping together. This was the first pledge campaign for the new congregation.

This theme was inspired by the Disney movie Encanto. One of the events of the campaign was that we licensed a showing of the movie. (Fees depend on the size of the audience and whether the movie is shown indoors or outside. I recall the fee for showing the movie inside for up to 100 people was less than \$200.)

At the time of the campaign, the congregation did not have a pastor and was relying on pulpit supply. I preached the sermon introducing the theme. You can view the service here - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r7PkH3vNQTM>

Here is the text of the sermon.

Burn Brighter  
Charlie Kuchenbrod  
September 25, 2022

See! **See!**<sup>1</sup> God is still speaking.

Behold, **Behold**, I am doing a new thing. Now it springs up; do you not perceive it. (Isaiah 43:19,RSV)

Fear not, **Fear not**, for I am with you, be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will uphold you (Isaiah 41:10, RSV)

Fear not, **fear not**, and behold, **behold**, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born in this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. (Luke 2:8, RSV)

Burn Brighter. **Burn brighter.**

We are using a single candle to symbolize our reunited congregation. The symbol falls short of our vision, in at least one way. We have not come together to continue as we have in the past, we have come together so that we can burn brighter. We can burn brighter by having a greater impact on our congregation, community and world. We can burn brighter by seeing who needs

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<sup>1</sup> Bold indicates that the congregation cued to repeat the word.

to experience God's love and by incarnating God's love for those people. For they will know we are Christians by our love.<sup>2</sup> We need to sing it louder. We need to live it louder. We need to burn brighter.

Our congregation will burn brighter as each of us burns brighter. However, this is not about individual glory. It is about fully incarnating, embodying, fulfilling our "being created in the image of God." Burning brighter in this way is not egotistical, because it is not for our own sake.

We just heard a verse from Proverbs:

The ways of right-living people glow with light; the longer they live, the brighter they shine.  
(Proverbs 4:18, The Message)

This is from Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of the Bible, The Message. What Peterson calls "right-living" is often translated as "righteous" which is now somewhat tainted because we usually hear the word righteous preceded by self, and self-righteous is usually not a good thing, right? I think what the proverb is getting at is that right living is alignment with God and God's purposes. When people's thoughts and actions are aligned with God, they glow with light, the longer they live, the brighter they shine. They burn brighter.

We heard from the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus said:

"Let me tell you why you are here. You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You've lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage. Here's another way to put it: You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I have put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand – shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous father in heaven." (Matthew 5:13-16, The Message)

Is this not a command to burn brighter?

I'm going to turn to some non-biblical sources. First, here is a quote from author Marianne Williamson. Some of you may have heard this before:

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<sup>2</sup> Referring to opening hymn.

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, 'Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?' Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

Is this not an invitation to burn brighter?

By the way this quote comes from.

— Marianne Williamson, [A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of "A Course in Miracles"](#)  
We are going to talk more about miracles in a few minutes.

Burn Brighter is our stewardship theme this fall. It is an invitation to deepen your commitment to your faith journey with this congregation. The goal of stewardship is not to get people to give more money, it is to inspire greater generosity, a deeper commitment to sharing your gifts. Deeper commitment may involve an element of sacrifice, but it is a sacrifice that leads to good things – a deeper sense of connection, deeper relationships with others and perhaps, if your heart is open to it, a deeper relationship with God.

The stewardship trinity is time, talent, and treasure, so if your blessings include money, deep commitment means giving money. Giving time and talent without giving money is not deep commitment. Giving money without giving time and talent is not deep commitment. Who am I to say this? Who am I not to? This message is deeply embedded in our scripture and faith tradition.

Another non-biblical resource to help us think about what it means to burn brighter, the Disney movie *Encanto*. While I don't think this movie is a religious allegory, I do think we can look at the movie through the lens of faith and that this lens will bring certain themes into focus. The faith lens is not about what we believe and how our beliefs shape what we see in the movie. Faith, for me, is not about beliefs, not about intellectual assent to a set of propositions. Rather, it is the trust that faith practices incarnate God's love and lead to flourishing lives – flourishing people and flourishing communities.

Let's watch a couple of minutes from the beginning of the movie.

OVER BLACK...

WE HEAR the sounds of nighttime in a COLOMBIAN  
CLOUD FOREST:

birds, insects, nature. Then the voice of an older  
woman, warm, nurturing and intimate...

ABUELA ALMA (V.O.)

Abre los ojos... open your eyes....

FADE UP ON: The closed eyes of five-year-old MIRABEL MADRIGAL; light of a CANDLE reflects in her over-sized, green-rimmed glasses. Mirabel opens one eye, then the other to find a wondrous, MAGICAL CANDLE rippling with firelight magic.

YOUNG MIRABEL

This is where our magic comes from?

ABUELA ALMA

Mm-hmm, this candle holds the miracle given to our family.

YOUNG MIRABEL

How did we get a miracle?

Alma pulls Mirabel onto her lap and the light of the candle grows. As Alma speaks, we dissolve to her as a young woman, along with her husband, PEDRO, and their THREE BABIES. The CANDLE burns brightly nearby.

ABUELA ALMA (INTO V.O.)

Long ago, when my three babies had just been born, your Abuelo Pedro and I were forced to flee our home. Strong light grows outside Young Alma and Pedro's window. Alma and Pedro look concerned.

Match to: Young Alma and Pedro (holding the candle) leading a frightened group of displaced people. They struggle across a beautiful RIVER.

ABUELA ALMA (V.O.)

And though many joined us, hoping to find a new home... we could not escape the dangers... and your Abuelo was lost.

The candle flickers and Pedro looks back from where they came, troubled. Pedro hands Abuela the candle as he throws his arms out protectively as... marauders approach. As they advance, Pedro vanishes into the wind in front of Abuela, who collapses... and we push in on the CANDLE.

ABUELA ALMA (V.O.)

But in our darkest moment... we were given... a

miracle.

As Abuela cries, we burst out of our impressionistic history into the SPLENDOR of a MIRACLE, rooted deeply in MAGICAL REALISM. The CANDLE blossoms with a magical intensity, banishing the darkness.

ABUELA ALMA (V.O.)

The candle became a magical flame that could never go out and it blessed us with a refuge in which to live. A place of wonder...

YOUNG MIRABEL (V.O.)

An Encanto...

ABUELA ALMA (V.O.)

An Encanto.

Around Abuela and her babies (and displaced people), MOUNTAINS rise, forming a protected VALLEY. The CANDLE shines brightly, enveloping ABUELA ALMA, its magic glows from the earth and a HOUSE grows around her.

ABUELA ALMA (V.O.)

The miracle grew... and our house, our casita itself, came alive to shelter us.

The House COMES TO LIFE, to the delight of the babies.

Let's get out our faith lens. What do we see? Where is God in this? The event that sets the plot in motion is a tragedy followed by a miracle. God does not prevent the tragedy. A lot of ink has been spilled trying to deal with the paradox of an all-knowing, all-powerful God who lets apparently innocent people suffer. I'm not going to go there except to say that some faithful people don't imagine God as a puppet master determining people's fates. These people still trust that God is still at work in the world, but instead of intervening directly, God works indirectly through people. While God may not prevent tragedies, God always yearns for what is best for people under any circumstances, including following tragedies. When we connect with this yearning, it gives us hope. God's yearning will lead us to a sanctuary, a blessed place. From Proverbs again, the ways of right-living people glow with light; the longer they live, the brighter they shine.

The miracle in the movie is represented by a burning candle. God's presence in worship is often represented by a burning candle. We have chosen a single lit candle to represent our new, re-united congregation. Hm.

There is a lot more to be explored in the movie. Over the coming weeks we will deal with some questions:

How do we find our gifts?

What are our gifts for?

How are our gifts linked to our identity, our purpose, and why we are here?

How do other people's gifts matter to me and mine to them?

What is our miracle?

I have one more non-biblical resource, but first, a tangent.

What do you think the postlude is for? Do you focus on the music, does it move you to a place of awe and wonder? Do you pull out your phone, check for what you may have missed, think about what you are going to do after church or for the rest of the day? Might I suggest that it is a moment to reflect: what am I going to take away from this service today? What do I want to remember, what do I want to act on? Feeling awe and wonder is okay, too!

Now to a third non-biblical resource. I was cruising the internet looking for burn brighter connections and saw Colbie Caillat song, Brighter than the Sun. This is a song celebrating a moment of connection, in this case a romantic connection. Hey if can use a faith lens on a popular movie, I can use the lens on a popular song. What if the celebration, what if the vision that hits you, is that you belong to something bigger than yourself. That there is something within me connects to something within other people and we are all connected to something beyond all of us. There is this thing within me, between us, and beyond us and I am a part of it. I can never be alone. Shouldn't this moment of connection, this aha moment, make you happy, make you optimistic, even make you want to sing and dance. So after the postlude, we are going to play the song. You don't need to sit and listen. Get up, greet people, and head on out. If you want to do a little singing and dancing, go for it.

If you think I'm stretching things too far by suggesting a romantic connection can stand in for a mystical connection, please pull out your bible and turn to the Song of Solomon. I'd quote you some of the racier parts, but it would make me blush.

See! **See!** God is still speaking!

Behold, **Behold**, I am doing a new thing.

Fear not, **Fear not**, for I am with you

Fear not, **fear not**, and behold, **behold**, I bring you good news

Burn Brighter. **Burn brighter.**

Amen! **Amen!**

We had a series of testimonies. They have been pulled out into a YouTube playlist you can find here - <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL7P1VHkkUiGsSo7yYmpKLljJCrZDmSFra> – and they were also transcribed for our newsletter and are reprinted here. Our newsletter goes out by email on a weekly basis and each week we included the Burn Brighter moment video clip and the transcript

Email follow up message:



# Burn Brighter

The logo is from John Stevenson. [john@funlinedesigns.com](mailto:john@funlinedesigns.com)

## **Burn Brighter moment 10-2-22 – Charlie Kuchenbrod**

Our stewardship theme this fall is Burn Brighter. We came together as a reunited congregation to burn brighter – to share more of God’s love within our congregation and throughout our community and world. In order to do this, we need to burn brighter as individuals by fully realizing our gifts as children of God. Last week we looked at scripture. First a verse from Proverbs teaching that people who align themselves with God’s purposes will glow with light, and that the longer they live, the brighter they will shine. Then we looked at what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus said that we are here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of the earth. He said that we are here to be light that brings out the God-colors of the world. Jesus said that he is putting us on a light stand on a hilltop and commands us to shine by being generous with our lives.

We also started looking at the movie Encanto through a faith lens. Over the next several weeks, you will hear from different people as we use some questions to explore the movie. This week’s question is how do we find our gifts? In the movie, the children and grandchildren of the family Madrigal are granted supernatural gifts by the Miracle, well, except Mirabel. When they are about five, each finds out about their gift in a special ceremony, where they approach a magic door, touch the doorknob, and receive their gift. The supernatural gifts include the ability to heal, to see the future, shape-shifting, amazing strength and amazing grace.

But the gift giving miracle is threatened somehow, and it falls to Mirabel, the granddaughter without any supernatural gift, who is told by others and tells herself that she has no gift, to go on a quest to save the miracle. In her effort to serve the beloved community by saving the miracle, we see that Mirabel has many gifts and these gifts emerge as she deals with the challenges in her quest. These gifts, not at all supernatural, include empathy, determination, courage, intelligence, collaborating with others, and persistence, not to mention singing and dancing!

There are stories like this in the Bible. There is a pattern. God calls someone, like Moses. Moses, like others, first responds by saying, “What, who, me? I am not the right person to do this.” God reassures Moses that he is the right person and he will be fine, and that he will have help, not only from God, but from others. In Moses’ case, from Aaron. The pattern is that God calls someone to do God’s work, the person says that they do not have the right gifts, and God reassures them that they do have gifts and that the gifts will emerge as they serve God.

Watch the Stewardship message - click the link below.

[October 2, 2022](#)

[October 9, 2022](#)



# Burn Brighter

**Burn Brighter moment 10-9-22 – Brita Gotberg**

Our stewardship theme this fall is **Burn Brighter**. Each week we are having stewardship moments during worship and you can see the first two here:





"What are our gifts for?"

Could we use our gifts, here at Granby Congregational Church, to serve the beloved community?

Beloved Community is a phrase that was coined by philosopher and theologian Josiah Royce in 1913. Many years later Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. popularized the term, filling it with new meaning, fueled by his faith. A Beloved community is not just a community that is loved. A Beloved community is a community in which everyone is cared for, absent of poverty, hunger, and hate.

Are we really supposed to use our gifts here at Granby Congregational to create and serve a Beloved Community? A place where poverty, hunger, and homelessness will not be tolerated? A place where EVERYONE is cared for? Dr. King knew it would take ALL systems changing to bring Beloved Community. Not just ONE system or one person- but many people across all areas of life, using their voices and gifts TO CREATE and SERVE a BELOVED COMMUNITY.

We might feel that our gifts are not sufficient to live up to the challenge that Dr. King put forward. You might feel like your gifts are too small, you are too busy, too tired, too young, or too old. Here, though, is the "magic" of a church when your gifts are used for creating community: we are a group of people made up of folks of all different ages and stages of life. When we walk through those doors or connect in town or on our computers and phones, we get to see people who aren't in our age bracket- people who

have seen more or less in life, many who have been through what you are going through, and some who are experiencing things you've already experienced. We are not just ONE person using our gifts for beloved community. This is a place where people from all walks of life can use their gifts together to create a place where ALL people are loved and cared for.

[Read Brita's full text](#)

Full Text:

This year our Stewardship moments are inspired by the movie Encanto. I hope that many of you were able to come together last night to watch it if you haven't already seen it! I have the privilege of working at Kelly Lane Primary School, so last year I was knee deep in Encanto lyrics and the song "We Don't Talk About Bruno" was a favorite at recess and lunch time. There was a lot of debate as to whether or not "Let It Go" from Frozen or "Bruno" from Encanto was the better song. I did not weigh in on the discussion- but left it up to the 7 and 8 year olds. I'm sure you all have your own opinion.

By now you probably know that the message we are working through from the movie is using the gifts we have been given.

Today we are asking "what are our gifts for"?

Here is some wisdom from Abuela Alma, the matriarch of the family in Encanto:

Abuela Alma: We swear to always help those around us and earn the miracle that somehow found us.

Abuela Alma: But hard work and dedication will keep the miracle burning, and each new generation must keep the miracle burning.

Abuela Alma: Will you use your gift to honor our miracle? Will you serve this community and strengthen our home?

Abuela Alma: And the greatest honor of our family has been to use our blessings to serve the beloved community.

Abuela Alma charges her family to use their gifts to help those around them and to serve the *beloved community*.

Might we use OUR gifts for this intent? Could we use our gifts, here at Granby Congregational Church, to serve *the beloved community*? Alba was referring to her town- but I do wonder if the author of these words- Lin Manuel Miranda- was giving a nod to the origin of the phrase- Beloved Community.

This phrase was coined by philosopher and theologian Josiah Royce in 1913. Many years later Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. popularized the term, filling it with new meaning, fueled by his faith. A Beloved community is not just a community that is loved. **A Beloved community is a community in which everyone is cared for, absent of poverty, hunger, and hate.** *Dr. King's beloved community philosophy centered on the belief that racism, bigotry and prejudices will one day be replaced 'by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood' and that 'poverty, hunger and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it.'*"

As inspiring as Dr. King's words are- when I hear them, I get a tad bit overwhelmed. Are we really supposed to use our gifts here at Granby Congregational to create and serve a Beloved Community? A place where poverty, hunger, and homelessness will not be tolerated? A place where EVERYONE is cared for? Dr. King knew it would take ALL systems changing to bring BC. Not just ONE system or one person- but many people across all areas of life, using their voices and gifts TO CREATE and SERVE a BELOVED COMMUNITY.

But I AM just one person, with some gifts, and perhaps right now my gifts involve being present at my job, meal planning, changing loads and loads of laundry, walking my dog, and getting my kids to the places they need to be. I often feel I do not have it in me to do much more of anything and I am certainly not using *my gifts* for a beloved community. How can my gifts be used for that vision? Maybe I feel a bit like Mirabel did when her door disappeared. Maybe you feel the same way too?

Here is the "magic" of a church when your gifts are used for creating community- and I hold this as a deep truth. Much like the family in Encanto- we are a group of people made up of folks of all different ages and stages of life. When I walk through those doors I get to see people who aren't in my age bracket- people who have seen more in life, many who have been through what I am going through, and some who are experiencing things I've already experienced. We are not just ONE person using our gifts for beloved community. This is a place (and this place isn't just in this building- it runs out onto the sidewalks, throughout town, into the grocery stores, onto our computers) where people from all walks of life can use their gifts together to create a place where ALL people are loved and cared for.

We get to use our gifts for each other so when I feel like I have so little left to give, when I'm feeling like Mirabel when her door disappears, someone can remind me that it is my time to be fed, my time to be quiet, my time to rest. You can remind me that my gifts for this season in my life are, in fact, building and serving the beloved community. Someday I can share those words with someone else. And those words that you have given me? That is God's work in the world.

# Burn Brighter

**Burn brighter moment 10-16-22 – Heather Sinon**

Our stewardship theme this fall is **Burn Brighter**.  
Each week we are having stewardship moments during  
worship and you can see the last two here:

How our gifts are linked to our sense of purpose and our identity



As you know, we have been having stewardship moments inspired by the movie  
“Encanto.” We have been pondering how to use the gifts we have been given to  
burn brighter, by using our gifts for the benefit of others.

In “Encanto” Mirabel laments,

“I can’t move mountains”

“I can’t make flowers bloom”

“I’m fine totally fine”

“I’ll stand on the side as others shine”

This lament could have been written by me. How is someone ordinary like me supposed to do God’s work in the world?

Many of you already know that I am a hospice volunteer as a direct result of a church discernment group. Early on in my time volunteering, I spent time visiting a gentleman who was suffering from end-stage dementia. I knew he was a legendary drag-racing engine builder in Connecticut. And I knew that “once a car guy, always a car guy...” so my way into relationship with him was through reading aloud articles from hot rod magazines. Sitting at his bedside, I’d read some, reflect some, ask rhetorical questions, and read some more. I often held his hand, just so he’d know I deeply cared for him.

One day his wife came by during a read-aloud session. She paused in the doorway, obviously touched by what she saw. She said “I don’t know how you do it. I really don’t. You must be a very, very special person.” Not wanting to confess that “I’m not special at all,” I just replied that spending time this way felt completely natural to me, and it was a pleasure reading to her husband every week.

Maybe she saw something in me that I hadn’t seen? Maybe she witnessed a small piece of a beloved community? She certainly did not know that I’d been launched into that path through the work of the church, fulfilling a purpose realized through a thoughtful process.

I hope that through my actions, she truly felt my belief that we are all on this journey together... we are all just walking each other home. I’m grateful to all of you for helping shape my identity and my purpose. We are called to give outward, to serve, and make sure everyone feels cared for. It’s God’s work; it’s a tall order, and it’s something we CAN do if we burn a little brighter, together.

[Read Heather's Full Text](#)

Full text:

We have been pondering how to meaningfully use the gifts we have been given, to burn brighter, to share more with our community, to use our gifts for the benefit of others.

Today I’ll be talking about how our gifts are linked to our sense of purpose and our identity.

To say that my relationship with God and with the community at large has been deepened by the church is like saying “there might be a pumpkin or two out front.”

'Deepened' doesn’t even scratch the surface.

In the movie “Encanto,” while singing a song titled “Waiting on a Miracle,” Mirabel laments

“I can’t move mountains”

“I can’t make flowers bloom”

“I’m fine totally fine”

“I’ll stand on the side as others shine”

This lament could have been written by me.

As someone who focuses on the things I can’t do,

The talents I don’t have,

The gifts I don’t possess,

Mirabel’s feelings really resonate with me.

How is someone ordinary like me supposed to do God’s work in the world?

Mirabel also says that she would do great things if someone

“Just please let [her] know, where do I go?”

This church community HAS helped me find where to go,

how to help create and serve the beloved community.

The guidance I received changed my sense of purpose;

(Actually allowed me to FIND my sense of purpose)

Shaped my identity, and helped me into deeper relationships with people I never would’ve met, let alone shared life-altering experiences with.

Many of you already know that I am a hospice volunteer as a direct result of a church discernment group.(If you didn’t know that before, now you do!) Being fully present with people at the end of life is an incredibly profound and moving experience.

Early in my time volunteering, I spent time every week in a local facility visiting a gentleman who was suffering from end-stage dementia. He couldn’t converse, couldn’t self-feed, and couldn’t walk. But I knew he was a legendary drag-racing engine builder in Connecticut. And I knew that “once a car guy, always a car guy...” so my way into relationship with him was through reading aloud articles from hot rod magazines, especially the technical articles. Sitting at his bedside, I’d read some, reflect some, ask rhetorical questions, and read some more. I often held his hand, just so he’d know I deeply cared for him.

His wife stopped by most days to visit, and one day she found me at his bedside during a read-aloud session. She paused in the doorway, obviously touched by what she saw.

She said “I don’t know how you do it. I really don’t. You must be a very, very special person.”

Not wanting to admit that “I’m not special at all,” I just replied that it was my pleasure, and spending time this way felt completely natural to me, and that I enjoyed reading to her husband every week.

Maybe she saw something in me that I hadn’t seen?

Maybe she saw that I was caring for her husband, just by being myself, without any special ability?

Maybe she witnessed the essence of a beloved community?

She certainly did not know that I’d been launched into that path through the work of the church, fulfilling a purpose realized through a thoughtful process.

I DO hope that through my actions, she truly felt my belief that we are all on this journey together... we are all walking each other home.

I’m grateful to all of you for helping shape my identity and purpose.

We are called to give outward, to serve, and make sure everyone feels cared for.

It’s God’s work; it’s a tall order, and it’s something we CAN do if we burn a little brighter, together.

**10-23-22 Burn Brighter moment – Rev. Darrell Goodwin**

Our stewardship theme this fall is **Burn Brighter**.  
Each week we are having stewardship moments during  
worship.

Here you can view a video from the October 23rd speaker:  
Rev. Darrell Goodwin as well as a videos from Kent Siladi  
and next week's guest, Valerie Tutson.



Good morning, friends, my name is Rev. Darrell Goodwin and I have the privilege of serving as the Executive Conference Minister of the Southern New England Conference of the United Christ. We are a collection of over 600 congregations, 1,400 authorized ministers, and 120,000 of God's faithful. When I think about that 120,000 of God's faithful, I think about the power we collectively have together to literally change the face of Southern New England, and if we really trust in our faith and our work, the world. This is a moment in the life of this congregation where you are choosing to burn brighter. You're choosing to think about how you can stretch yourself beyond the immediacy of the ways in which you've envisioned or thought about yourself and charting a path forward.

Our world is in desperate need of safe and sacred places that are transformative, that stretch, that renew, that call us towards something deeper and brighter. As you burn brighter the invitation is how will you invest in financial, as well as time and talent ways, that we might move this value proposition together. The yes that you are making as a congregation mirrors the yes I hope folks make when they sow into the southern New England Conference and who God is calling us collectively to be as we live the love and justice of Jesus. Your gift matters. It matters so that people might find a safe and sacred place. It matters that people might see the beautiful work that's happening in Granby and be inspired to move beyond the immediacy of their fears, so they can find their yes. It matters because collectively when we come together I truly believe the scripture where two or three are gathered in my name I will be in the midst. Where two or three decide to put their resources together I believe God is in the midst. God is in the midst so that justice might be proclaimed. God is in the midst so that



extravagant welcome might be manifest. God is in the midst that we might create collectively through our will and our effort modern day miracles. My friends, I know already that in this season and in the next you will not leave Granby the same way you came. God bless and I trust that you will sow into the future of what God is doing as we burn brighter together.

Rev. Darrell Goodwin

[Read Darrell's Full Text](#)



**Kent Siladi**



**Valerie Tutson**

[Watch All the Stewardship Videos](#)

Rev. Darrell Goodwin Full Text:

Good morning, friends, my name is Rev. Darrell Goodwin and I have the privilege of serving as the Executive Conference Minister of the Southern New England Conference of the United Christ. We are a collection of over 600 congregations, 1,400 authorized ministers, and 120,000 of God's faithful. When I think about that 120,000 of God's faithful, I think about the power we collectively have together to literally change the face of Southern New England, and if we really trust in our faith and our work, the world. This is a moment in the life of this congregation where you are choosing to burn brighter. You're choosing to think about how you can stretch

yourself beyond the immediacy of the ways in which you've envisioned or thought about yourself and charting a path forward. Whenever I visit churches, I sing this song which I want to share with you and I hope it'll make sense for you in this season of generosity and sowing into our collective work together. Hear these words:

You won't leave here like you came in Jesus name,  
Bound, oppressed, broken, sick or the same,  
For the power of God is still the same,  
You won't leave here like you came in Jesus name.

I won't leave here like I came in Jesus name,  
Bound, oppressed, broken sick, or the same,  
For the power of God is still the same,  
You won't leave here like you came,  
I won't leave here like I came in Jesus name.

If you think about our collective mission together we might end with this line

We won't leave here like we came in Love's name,  
Bound, oppressed, broken, sick or the same,  
For the power of love is still the same,  
You won't leave here like you came,  
I can't leave here like I came,  
We won't leave here like we came in Love's name.

Every invitation to our churches is that people might encounter us, they might walk into our sacred spaces and that they might leave differently than the way they've come. The Southern New England Conference has been inspired by what's happening in Granby. We've been inspired because somehow two congregations have chosen to weave a path together that people might not leave you the same way they came. Our world is in desperate need of safe and sacred places that are transformative, that stretch, that renew, that call us towards something deeper and brighter. The choice you've made to chart this new path, a path that is often still not happening in the United Church of Christ, you are leading a way. You are doing a maverick thing that I hope will inspire that only the immediacy of your community but might inspire the southern New England conference and the United Church of Christ as a whole. As you burn brighter the invitation is how will you invest in financial, as well as time and talent ways, that we might move this value proposition together. The yes that you are making as a congregation mirrors the yes I hope folks make when they sow into the southern New England Conference and who God is calling us collectively to be as we live the love and justice of Jesus. Your gift matters. It matters so that people might find a safe and sacred place. It matters that people might see the beautiful work that's happening in Granby and be inspired to move beyond the immediacy of their fears, so they can find their yes. It matters because collectively when we come together I truly believe the scripture where two or three are gathered in my name I will be in the midst. Where two or three decide to put their resources together I believe God is in the midst. God is in the midst so that justice might be proclaimed. God is in the midst so that extravagant welcome might be manifest. God is in the midst that we might create collectively through our will and our

effort modern day miracles. My friends, I know already that in this season and in the next you will not leave Granby the same way you came. God bless and I trust that you will sow into the future of what God is doing as we burn brighter together.

### **10-30-22 Burn Brighter Moment – Bob Giles and Becky Sielman**

Our stewardship theme this fall is **Burn Brighter**.  
Each week we are having stewardship moments during  
worship.

Here you can view a video from  
October 30 with Bob Giles and Becky Sielman.



### **Bob Giles & Becky Sielman**

Bob: Our stewardship theme this year has been Burn Brighter. This describes our opportunity as we reunite as a congregation.

Becky: Whether or not we Burn Brighter depends on the choices that we make both individually and collectively. We each have to decide how we are going to

share our gifts and make the commitments that are necessary to make our faith community burn brighter in Granby and in the world.

Bob: We find ourselves at a pivotal moment. Our two congregations have voted to reunite to form a new UCC church in Granby. There is a lot of activity right now, as we formulate a 2023 budget for the new church, work to fill the roster of Officers, and Board and Committee members and Chairs, and pray for the members of the Search Committee as they seek a designated-term pastor to lead us.

Becky: To get anything to burn, you need three things: fuel, oxygen, and a source of ignition. We can think of money as fuel, time and talent as oxygen, and faith as the spark that ignites.

Bob: This is why we ask people to pledge: So we know how much fuel we have.

Becky: This is why we ask people to serve in a variety of congregational leadership roles, so we have enough oxygen as well.

Bob: And this is why we come together in worship, so that our faith can ignite us and we can indeed Burn Brighter.

Becky: We, your Moderators, stand before you today and ask you to prayerfully consider your 2023 pledge. As a new church, we need a budget, a financial roadmap to help us get to where we want to be. Determining our financial capacity is the foundation of that plan, and individual and family giving is by far our most important source of funding.

Bob: We encourage everyone to consider a pledge. A pledge is not a membership fee, it is a faith commitment, a commitment to practice faith through generosity. You will of course be fully welcome here whether or not you pledge.

Becky: Pledge cards are being mailed tomorrow. We ask you to bring your completed pledge card to church next Sunday, or mail it to one of the church offices. Our budget process depends on having this information, so please return your pledge cards as soon as you are able.

Bob: Fuel without oxygen will not burn. So we also stand before you today and ask you to prayerfully consider how you can share your time and talents to help make our church a strong voice in the community.

Becky: As you heard earlier from Lisa, you will get a survey this week, regarding how you would like to share your time and talents. We will be electing Officers and Board and Committee Chairs and Members on December 11 th , so please be on the lookout for that survey and complete it promptly.

Bob: We pray that everyone will be generous by faithfully sharing your time, talents, and finances, so that we will be able to maintain and build our capacity to love and serve God.

Becky: Let us indeed Burn Brighter!

Bob: Thank you.

### [Watch All the Stewardship Videos](#)

Bob was the Moderator of First Congregational and Becky was the Moderator of South Congregational

Bob: Our stewardship theme this year has been Burn Brighter. This describes our opportunity as we reunite as a congregation.

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Becky: Let us indeed Burn Brighter!

Bob: Thank you.

### **Additional Communication**

A long-time member was moved to write a message to share with the congregation.

Our stewardship theme this fall is **Burn Brighter.**

A note from Bill Bentley



Dear Friends in the NEW Granby Congregational Church, UCC,

Our vote to merge First and South Church and form a new Granby Congregational Church,

UCC, is important progress! Despite all the work by many to get us this far, however, we must continue efforts on many tasks. Solid results will require our Time, Talent, and Treasure! Success in 2023 requires each of to give generously.

Treasure - money - is not the most critical issue for our new church. Our relationships with one another, our relationships with others in our community, and our relationships with God are far more important. We are refining what those relationships will be in the form of programs, from worship to music to Christian education to community outreach and service – and beyond. The discernment process is ongoing, but we lay the foundation in the coming year. The breadth and depth of our church programs will be the result of the creativity, the effort, and the resources available.

We must have a budget before we start the 2023 Church Year. This is simply sound financial

practice for any organization, be it a large corporation or a sole proprietorship or a small

religious non-profit in Granby CT. It is important for the beneficiaries. Our congregants, their

children, and folks in the community depend on our services, be they meals, food pantry or the occasional funeral or baptism. The budget is important for staff who receive part or all of their livelihood from their work for our church. We have many partners, like the Waste Not Want Not Kitchen and Holcomb Farm Fresh Access program, that plan on our aid in their annual programming. In sum, our Christian mission carries the responsibility of understanding our funding and planning the allocation of our resources each year

This brings us back to money. The single most important source of annual funding for our

church flows from the donation each of us gives. Pledges are our best estimate of those

donations. Bedrock premises for merging and forming our new Congregational Church is that we will reduce costs, increase our internal donor base, and supply more outreach and services to the greater Granby community. We will spend only what we have; we vow to preserve endowments for future generations by limiting our annual draw to about 4.5% of asset value. Consequently, we can do more for ourselves and for others only if we dig into our own pockets and give generously.

Ann and I held steady on our pledge level for the past few years because we are retired. But we listened to the reasons for a positive vote on merging and forming a

new church. The results so far are encouraging, and we increased our 2023 pledge significantly. I hope each of you can increase your pledge by an amount that fits your household budget and priorities.

Regards and thank you for considering these points,

*Bill Bentley*

## **Stewardship Sunday**

We were extremely fortunate to have the fabulous Val Tutson lead us in worship on our Stewardship Sunday – the day we formally ask people to pledge. You can view the worship service here - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Q0r5d3-I5I>. The next day we sent out a pledge letter and pledge cards.

## **Burn Brighter pledge invitation**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

Granby Congregational Church is being born! We voted on May 25<sup>th</sup> to move ahead. We celebrated coming together on September 18<sup>th</sup>. So much is in process as we look towards our legal birthday on January 1. Now we are taking the important step of asking for your financial support in the form of a 2023 pledge.

Our stewardship theme is Burn Brighter. If you have not been in church to hear the sermons and stewardship moments, you can find them on our websites or in your email inbox. Please see the back of the page for some highlights – but still check out the full messages! Whether or not we Burn Brighter depends on the choices that we make together and as individuals. We each have to decide if we are going to share our gifts and make the commitments necessary to keep our faith community strong.

To set something aflame, you need three things: Fuel, oxygen, and a source of ignition. We can think of money as fuel, time and talent as oxygen, and faith is our ignition source. This is why we ask people to pledge: we need to know how much fuel we will have. As a new church, we need a new financial roadmap to help us reach our objectives. Determining our financial capacity, that is, knowing what people are planning to give, is the foundation of our plan.

A pledge card is enclosed. We are asking people to bring their pledge cards with them to church on this Sunday, or to mail them in if they cannot be in church. We are counting on people to return their pledge cards by November 20, so that the financial plan can be reviewed and ready to present to the congregation on December 11. (The return envelope is addressed to South Church – we have quite a lot of these and might as well use them!)

We understand that some people face financial uncertainty or financial insecurity. A pledge is **not** a contract. We understand that some people may not be able to fulfill their intentions. We



still encourage everyone to pledge. A pledge is also **not** a membership fee. You will be fully welcome whether or not you pledge.

A financial pledge **is** a faith commitment. It is a commitment to practice faith through generosity. It shows that we have faith that the money we share will be used for God's purposes and in ways that we cannot accomplish acting only on our own. Our world is in desperate need of safe and sacred places that are transformative, that stretch, that renew, and that call us towards something deeper and brighter. Join us in creating a church that does this.

Blessings,

Bob Giles, Moderator, First Church

Becky Sielman, Moderator, South Church

**Follow up email after pledge cards were mailed out**

Our stewardship theme this fall is **Burn Brighter.**

*Your pledge matters because we turn money into God's love which changes people's lives for the better.*

**This is true:**

Whoever you are, wherever you are on life's journey, you are welcome at Granby Congregational Church.

This is an unqualified statement. There is no asterisk saying that this only applies to people who provide financial support.

**This is also true:**

The primary source of funding for Granby Congregational Church is pledges from members and friends. Other sources of income include investments, fundraising, and rent, but pledging matters most.

**And this is true:**

Even the smallest pledges are meaningful--to you and to us. A pledge is another strand in the web of connections that forms our faith community.

**More truth:**

There are still people who pledged to either First Church or South Church for 2022 that have not returned 2023 pledge cards. Our new church is creating a new budget and crucial choices about staffing, programs, and outreach can only be made when we know what total pledging will be.

**And finally, this truth:**

We do not want you to give out of a sense of guilt, because this will erode the meaningfulness and significance of your gift. Rather, we hope that joy motivates all of our giving, knowing that we, together, have helped to spread God's love to others.

[Watch All the Stewardship Videos](#)

**11-20-Burn Brighter Moment – preliminary results, Charlie Kuchenbrod**

A few words from Charlie Kuchenbrod from November 20 worship.



We are grateful that over 80 people have chosen to help us Burn Brighter by making a faith commitment to financially support Granby Congregational Church. If you have already pledged, thank you so much.

Remember when Val Tutson was here and she talked about how exhausting this whole process has been, and we still have a long way to go? She got some Amens from the choir, didn't she? Well, here is some good news. We are excited that we have nine new pledges so far. Some of these pledges are new/new pledges – people that have never pledged before. Some of these pledges are from people that did not pledge last year but have pledged in the past. Whether these people lost their pledge cards last year, or couldn't find a stamp, or were facing financial uncertainty, or had doubts about the future of the church last year, or whatever kept them from pledging last year, this year the spirit moved them to renew their pledges. We are glad to have their support. I bet that they are glad to be offering their support.

For those of you who have not yet pledged yet, we hope the spirit will move you to make this choice. Maybe even today! Or soon! Come spirit, come! So far, the total of new pledges and increased pledges significantly exceeds decreased pledges. It feels like we have momentum building. If you haven't pledged, you might think to yourself, great, things are on track without me, maybe my pledge doesn't matter. You might think this, but you would be wrong. All pledges matter. Pledges matter to the congregation but they also matter to each individual. The invitation to Burn Brighter is both an individual and a collective invitation. We can only Burn Brighter as a congregation when individuals burn brighter. We need to keep fanning the flame.

Thank you.

### **A final follow up message**

Our stewardship theme this fall is **Burn Brighter**.

#### **Cures For Pledging Procrastination**

*“Procrastination is my sin.  
It brings me naught but sorrow.  
I know that I should stop it.  
In fact, I will — tomorrow!”  
— Attributed to Gloria Pitzer*

Is procrastination keeping you from returning your pledge card? Here are some ideas to help you Burn Brighter:

Send in your pledge card!

#### **Can't find your pledge card?**

Look here's [one](#).

Or look in the narthex (fancy church word for foyer) at the South Campus.

Or call or email Sue Miltenberger [sue@firstchurchgranby.org](mailto:sue@firstchurchgranby.org) or 860.653.4537 and she'll send one.

Or write it on the back of your favorite recipe and mail it to Granby Congregational Church, PO Box 779, Granby, CT 06035. (Recipes will be shared!)

Or write your pledge information on the label of a bottle of wine, put in in a brown paper bag, and drop it off at the First Church office. (Sue prefers red wine!)

### **Can't find a stamp?**

Bring your pledge card to church!

Or email, call, or text Charlie Kuchenbrod [Charlie.kuchenbrod2@gmail.com](mailto:Charlie.kuchenbrod2@gmail.com) or 860.490.7332 and he will come and pick it up.

Or email, call or text Charlie with your pledge information and he will fill out a pledge card for you.

### **Can't decide how much to pledge?**

This one is harder. It rarely hurts to pray. Scriptural and traditional guidance is to give "first fruits" – give first and spend and save what is left – and to give proportionally, that is, think in terms of the percentage of your income will you give away.

So far for 2023, the average pledge is a bit more than \$3,000 and the median (half higher, half lower) pledge is \$2,000. For new pledges, the average is about \$1,700 and the median is \$1,350.

Lean in: Generosity is a faith practice that reflects our faith and strengthens our faith. Also, studies show that generous people are happier and healthier, both physically and mentally healthier.

### **Concerned that you may not be able to fulfill your pledge?**

A pledge is a faith commitment, not a contract. While we hope that you make a pledge with every intention of fulfilling it, we understand that there are uncertainties and challenges in life.

Please don't let these concerns keep you from pledging!

**An electronic thank you that went out to people who pledged**

Our stewardship theme this fall is **Burn Brighter.**

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Please don't let these concerns keep you from pledging!

### **An electronic thank you went out to all who pledged**

We also sent out handwritten thank you notes to everyone who pledged, striving to get them out with a week of receiving the pledge. We had four people writing thank you notes. There was a standard message that we invited note writers to personalize.

### **Thank you! Here's a sneak preview of the new GCC logo**

Thank you for making a pledge to support our reunited Granby Congregational Church. Your financial support is an important cornerstone of our new church community. It will enable us to be a brighter stronger presence in the wider community and world.

As we come together as a new community of faith, our pledges show our commitment to practice generosity and willingness to work and worship together sharing our talents, our time and our treasure. To be people who want to Burn Brighter in our community. Together, we can make a difference.

Thank you for being part of this faith community.

We are excited to share our new GCC logo. John Stevenson created and shared three potential logos with the Church Council. The first one was great, the second one better, and the third one the best. You will see the Cs for Congregational Church nested in the G for Granby. The nested Cs evoke a labyrinth,

expressing that we are on a faith journey together. The “arm” of the G – the part of the G that makes it different from a C – is extended to form a cross, expressing that we are a church. One extension is in red, signifying love, and one extension is yellow, signifying light. We will Burn Brighter! Others may find additional symbolism.

We are grateful to John!

Please do not share the new logo in any public way, especially on social media, so our communications group can control the introduction of the new logo to the world.

Here it is:



GRANBY  
CONGREGATIONAL  
CHURCH, UCC

