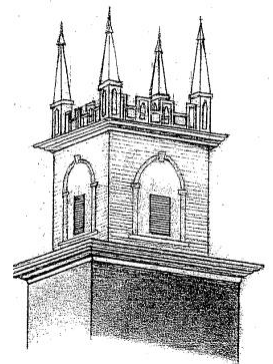


**+ N.E.W.S. CONNECTION**  
Pittsford Congregational Church  
United Church of Christ  
121 Village Green  
PO Box 570  
Pittsford, VT 05763



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**Message from the Pastor**

**Conversations with Jesus**

A provocative and timely bestseller which I have now read twice is Sherry Turkle's *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age*, first published in 2015. She makes clear her purpose in the first two paragraphs of the book:

Why a book on conversation? We're talking all the time. We text and post and chat. We may even begin to feel more at home in the world of our screens. Among family and friends...we turn to our phones instead of each other. We readily admit we would rather send an electronic message or mail than commit to a face-to-face meeting or a telephone call.

This new mediated life has gotten us into trouble. Face-to-face conversation is the most human—and humanizing thing we do. Fully present to one another, we learn to listen. It's where we develop the capacity for empathy. It's where we experience the joy of being heard, of being understood. And conversation advances self-reflection, the conversations with ourselves that are the cornerstone of early development and continue throughout life.

Yes, I know I am “preaching to the choir” on this point, with good reason. One of the last courses I took for the renewal of my teaching license was called “The Google Classroom.” When I voiced my concern to the instructor, at least twenty-five years my junior, about students increasingly relying on technology to communicate, he peremptorily dismissed my worry. “You are a digital immigrant. All kids today are digital natives. Conversations they have on their screens and phones are just as real as having the other person present.” I disagreed then, albeit silently because I had to pass the class, but today my fears seem entirely justified. It is not the same as in person when sending a text or interacting with a screen.

Of course, I use technology to communicate. I send and respond to many emails every day. Sending a text does have a purpose for conveying short messages. But when it becomes the norm for a conversation, it triggers worry in me. Taken to an extreme, it disengages the sender. We all know someone who may feel loneliness or a sense of social disconnection in spite of the number of friends they have on Facebook, TikTok or some other social media platform. This sense of yearning or unfulfillment increasingly tilts toward younger people who have drifted away from having face to face conversations.

The power and purpose we experience when we worship together in person needs to extend outwards, to our family, to our friends, and to those whom we sense are hurting. We all have the power to witness our Christian faith without becoming hardline evangelists. No advance theological training is needed to achieve this purpose. How do we do this? We achieve this through the continuous active pursuit of conversations. As inspiration, let us think of the transformative power Jesus had through individual conversations. In the four Gospels, we have the great speeches and discourses of Jesus. The Beatitudes in Matthew's Gospel immediately comes to mind. There are the dialogues with various apostles. We can take as our examples the lowly and disenfranchised whom Jesus sought.

Two examples serve as exemplary meditations on how the ministry of Jesus touched and transformed lives through the power of a conversation. In these instances, Jesus took the initiative; he reached out to those who needed healing. Take a look at what is going on in these passages.

In John 4:7-42, Jesus asks a Samaritan woman for water. She replies why are you talking to me? Aside from her lowly status as a woman not supposed to be addressing a man, she knew there were centuries of hostility between the Jews and her people. We have in front of us today in the same places the deep sense of tribalism and smoldering hatred. As you read this passage, pay attention to the outcome of this conversation and its widening ripples of how this estranged woman fully understood who Jesus as the Son of God—all from a single encounter.

In John 5:1-15, Jesus meets a crippled beggar and asks him, “Do you want to be healed?” Crippled beggars exist among us today. While they may not be physically maimed, they may be caught in the throes of homelessness or addiction. It is an entirely too human response when a stranger talks to us, we tend to look away. Jesus did not.

We are winding down the church year. Advent is coming, its significance too often blasted out by Christmas commercialism. With the onset of fewer hours of daylight, some people’s spirits sink. It is timely than ever to reach out and engage someone in *conversation*. Optimum conditions: you **see** the person to whom you are speaking. If an in-person visit is not possible, I often say, “The phone still works.” Many of you may remember the old saying, “Let your fingers do the walking.” Never underestimate the healing benefit of a good conversation.

In prayer and conversation with all of you,

Michael F. Dwyer, Pastor