

PARTNERS

I slightly adapted the following story from Marc Gellman's book, *Does God Have a Big Toe?* It's called *Partners*.

Before there was anything, there was God, a few angels, and a huge swirling gob of rocks and water with no place to go. The angels asked God, "Why don't you clean up this mess?" And God said, "Good idea! It might take me five or six days, but that's okay because I don't have anything on my calendar this week."

So God collected rocks from the huge swirling glob, put them together in clumps and said, "Some of these clumps of rocks will be planets, and some will be stars and comets and asteroids, and some of these rocks will be . . . just rocks."

The next day, God collected water from the huge swirling gob, put it together in pools of water and said, "Some of these pools of water will be oceans and lakes, and some will be clouds, and some of this water will be . . . just water."

Then the angels said, "Well, God, it's neater now, but is it finished?" And God answered . . . NOPE!"

One of the planets God created was particularly beautiful, so on it God placed growing things, and creeping things, and things that only God knows what they are; and when God had done all this, the angels asked God, "Is the world finished now?"

And God answered, "NOPE!"

And then God made a man and a woman from some of the water and dust, and said to them, "I'm tired now. Please finish up the world for me . . . really, it's almost done." But the man and woman said, "We can't finish the world by ourselves! You have the plans and we're too little to do it!"

"You're big enough," God answered them. "But I'll tell you what. If you keep trying to finish the world, I will be your partner."

The man and the woman asked, "What's a partner?"

God answered, "A partner is someone you work with to accomplish something that neither of you can do alone. If you have a partner, it means that you can never give up, because your partner is depending on you. On the days you think I'm not doing enough, and on the days I think you're not doing

enough, even on those days we're still partners and we must not stop trying to finish the world. That's the deal." And they all agreed to that deal.

Then the angels asked God, "So, is the world finished yet?"

And God answered, "I don't know. Go ask my partners."

As we think about the partnership God established between God's self and human beings "in the beginning," let's fast forward ahead to today, Children's Sunday, June 10th, 2018. Currently, the First Congregational Church of Scarborough is involved in a two-way partnership. There's the partnership between our church and God, and there's the partnership between the members of our church, you and me, with each other. Being in a partnership involves responsibility. Partners are responsible for one another and to each other. In a true partnership there's an agreement, whether spoken or unspoken, legally binding or non-binding, to assist each other, support each other, and treat each other fairly and honestly.

In our partnership with Almighty God our Creator, we're responsible for caring for God's creation—the most relevant parts of that creation to us being our home, the earth, its resources, and the multitude of living creatures that inhabit this planet God made for us. In our partnership with Christ our Savior, we're responsible for carrying on Christ's ministry of love, healing and reconciliation in the world. Together. As the church, the Body of Christ. And in our partnership with one another as members of the church, the Body of Christ, we're responsible for loving, guiding, helping and supporting one another in our efforts to carry on Christ's ministry of love, healing and reconciliation in the world.

One of the important responsibilities we have as partners with God, Christ, and one another as members of the church, is Christian Education. It doesn't matter how many or how few children our faith community has, the partnership with God and one another still stands. As the Creator said in the cute children's creation story I shared a few minutes ago, "If you have a partner, it means that you can never give up, because your partner is depending on you."

Kathy Griffiths and Laura Libby, the individuals who taught Sunday School this past year—and who have been teaching for many years now—as well as Vicky-Ann Goodwin who just moved away—those individuals have been faithful partners to us, giving of their time and energy and sacrificing the opportunity to attend worship on most Sunday mornings, to help the children in our church learn about God, Jesus, the church, and basic Christian values and morals. Their partnership with us has been invaluable. The results of their efforts may not be seen by us right away, but God sees them. And I can assure you that the Lord will bless their work and cause it to bear fruit, even if it doesn't happen right

away.

I would say the same thing about our nursery workers, too. Penny van Duyne, Elizabeth Deal, Liane Giambalvo and Natalie Iaconeta are also dedicated partners with God and with us. It may sound simple and easy, to watch over and care for the youngest children who come to our church. But it's not. It takes exceptional skill, a special kind of love, and a whole lot of patience to spend an hour with a crew of rambunctious toddlers, getting them to sit still long enough to read them a story or play a game with them, all the while trying to teach them a thing or two about God and Jesus. So, along with our Sunday School teachers, our nursery volunteers also deserve our deep gratitude, because without them we wouldn't have a nursery; and without a nursery, we would have little to attract parents and families with young children.

One last partnership in our Sunday School I want to hold up are the mentors who have participated in our new mentoring program. For those of you who may not know, our mentoring project invites the elders in our church share some of their life experiences and a bit of their faith with our Sunday School kids. The idea is to bridge the age gap between the young and old in our church, create new relationships, and turn strangers into friends. Karen Jackson, who has taken this project on, is very excited about it and sees great potential. But the mentoring program wouldn't exist here in our church if our mentoring partners hadn't been willing to sign on as volunteers.

So, another year of Sunday School is behind us. I'm so thankful to all the partners in our church who have in any way participated in and helped out in our Sunday School, our nursery and our mentoring program this year. Our Christian Education program is small, to be sure; but it's an extremely vital partnership that, God willing, and with the help of all of us in this church, has the potential to expand and grow in the future.

Maybe you're wondering, what's the future of our Sunday School here at the First Congregational Church of Scarborough? Will it bounce back and begin to thrive and grow again? Is it even going to be around in a few years? Those are important questions, to be sure. Will we be able to make our Sunday School program, our nursery and our mentoring program bigger, better and more vibrant for future members of our church in the years to come? Will we have an active Youth Group again?

I don't know. I guess we'll have to go ask our partners.

Better yet, let's all of us make an effort to strengthen our own personal partnership with God, with one another, and with our church. Amen.