

Pastor Makes a Return Visit

In April, the New Boston Congregational Church was visited by Michael Gantt, who served as pastor at the church nearly 50 years ago. Now a pastor in Brattleboro, Vermont, Gantt is also a conference speaker and author currently doing missionary and humanitarian work in West Kenya with the Immanuel Christian School for the Deaf, www.kenyadevfund.org.

Pastor Gantt published the following description of his return visit on his "Planting the Seeds for Renewal" blog on his website, www.mkgantt.com, which is devoted to religious, family, and political concerns.

BACK TO NEW BOSTON

By Michael Gantt

In 1970-71, I was newly married and graduation from Bible College was approaching quickly.

Each Sunday my wife and I drove from our home in Lenox, Massachusetts to the rural community of Sandisfield, Massachusetts, where I served as student pastor of the New Boston Congregational Church. The Junior and Senior classes at my school had provided limited pastoral leadership to the small congregation for a number of years. When I graduated, in 1971, I left a Junior classmate of mine in charge.

I did not return to New Boston – until one Sunday this past April.

After 48 years, my path happened to cross with a young man who is currently providing pastoral care for the church. He invited me to visit to stand behind the very pulpit from which I preached almost one-half century ago. It was surreal, to say the least.

When I last stood in that place I was married less than one year, childless, and did not yet even have a degree in my hand. Now, almost 50 years have passed; six children, 12 grandchildren, and 46 years of pulpit ministry in southern Vermont. We have all buried loved ones, welcomed new members to our family, succeeded in some things, failed at much. One thing has remained constant: The faithfulness of God.

Snugly tucked in the Berkshire Hills of Western Massachusetts, Sandisfield is a tiny, somewhat isolated community with a population of around 800 persons. Over the years, every church in town has slowly dried up and faded away – except for the little congregation at New Boston Congregational.

For 144 years they have opened the doors for the preaching of the gospel. Oh, they have struggled against the tide. The community has changed, population has declined, and finances have been a real and constantly present issue in keeping the doors open at the "Little Brown Church" as it is known. But, open they are, and I was blessed to hold my bride's hand as we walked into that beautiful sanctuary once again.

In a day of shopping-mall churches and mega ministries, few of us ever think of the faithful, sometimes tiny, congregations who faithfully hold



Photo Deena Forcier

forth the light of life in little out of the way places that most of us couldn't even find on a map.

There was no big orchestra that April Sunday morning. Two older gentlemen and a wonderful lady led us in worship by guitar. It was simple. It was genuine. It was a sweet, precious time of worship. I was so powerfully moved by the simple eloquence of the moment. There was no pretense to make, no egos to stroke, no effort was made to impress; just 25 or so glad voices willingly lifted up in worship to the King.

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This probably signaled the end of such especially beautiful clock cases like Carter's.

Was it a bit of fate or just chance that led our new neighbors here? Time may tell.

Meanwhile, a hearty Welcome-to-Sandisfield! to Jeff and Jack and good luck to them. We'll check back from time to time and report about their progress. 🍷



*The old Porter & Carter shop, still standing.
Photo Sandisfield Then & Now, 2011*

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The little church at New Boston will no doubt continue to face enormous issues in holding back the tide of progress which pushes such antiquated movements aside for the bigger, the better, the more impressive and, often, less spiritual. I encouraged them to hold fast; to not be intimidated by their smallness in the shadow of the big, big world that is pushing in – but to continue to be a very bright, little light in that place.



The interior of the New Boston Congregational Church.

I sensed something special in New Boston on that April Sunday; something not of this earth. A little breath of Heaven was blowing through that old chapel and this thing I do know: That wherever the breath of God blows it brings life. I am praying the breath of God that blows through that “little brown church” will blow new life into the community that surrounds it.

As I drove back to the “big city” of Brattleboro, Vermont, I wanted to hold my breath just long enough to exhale a little bit of that heavenly breeze into my town, because Lord knows, we need it. 🍷

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