



# FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

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**The Rev. Dr. Martha R. Jacobs**  
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**An Open and Affirming Church**

November 2015

Dear Friends,

Last week, a gentleman appeared at my door. He had called earlier in the day asking if we could be of help to him, because he was out of money and in desperate need. He and his wife had slept in their car for the past several nights and were just about out of gas and food. He said that he had looked up churches and something inside him told him to call us. I was skeptical of that, but talked with him and then told him we could provide him with a grocery card from a grocery store and to come by.

I did not expect to see the person who appeared in my doorway. I mean, I did not expect to see a distinguished looking gentleman dressed in a sports coat, slacks and a nice shirt. He was clean but it was clear that his clothing had been worn for several days. He walked with the assistance of a cane. I invited him in and he asked if we could go into the sanctuary to talk. We sat at the back of the church and he looked up at our cross and a smile came to his face. He said that he now understood why that “something inside of him” had directed him to us. He said he felt warmth and compassion emanating from that cross.

We spent about 15 minutes talking about what had happened in his life and how his sons had insisted that they move from Florida to New York City and the work that he had lined up in New York had fallen through. His sons were happy to be in Harlem, but he and his wife found it difficult to be there. His wife has Lupus and the conditions they could afford were not helpful to her physical issues. He asked that we pray and so we took hands and prayed – first I prayed for he and his wife and his children and that his situation would take a turn for the better. He then prayed not for himself or his family, but for us – FCC – because we were here at a time that he so desperately needed help. His prayer touched me deeply.

As we were leaving the sanctuary, he mentioned that his wife had wanted to stay in the car and take in the beauty of the fall leaves around her. He said that they could not believe the oasis they had found while looking for our church. I invited him to come to worship with us any time. He asked if we needed the leaves raked or any other work done, said that he appreciated the grocery card and hoped to be able to pay it back. I suggested that once he and his wife were settled wherever they ended up, that he could pay it forward. He hugged me and left with tears in his eyes. I still feel that hug – it was one of such gratitude and filled with divine love.

This is the most recent encounter I have had with someone who has been in such dire need. Unfortunately, he has not been the only one. During my more than two years here, there have been many. Each one has a different story and each one on a different life journey. I don't ask if they have a belief system or are a member of a church. We don't require that they give us a breakdown of how they spend what we give them. But each one of these encounters forces me to look at the world from a different perspective, to see the world through someone else's eyes. They keep me focused on one of the reasons we are here: to help the least of these.

As I mentioned in my sermon last week, during the Confirmation retreat, one of the Confirmands said that he didn't understand why he feels so good when he helps others, but he does. And, he wondered aloud, “Isn't that kind of weird?” Well, yes, that maybe weird, but serving those who are “the least of these”, is what is required of us as Christians. We are transformed when we

shift our perspective from our needs to the needs of others. What could be more worthwhile than to be able to give to those whose life situation has led them to be among the least of these. We can give them hope,

So here we find ourselves in another Stewardship campaign, a time when we reach out to our membership and ask for your support. It is that support that allows us to keep the lights on and the doors open. It is that support that allows us to give out grocery cards, pay someone's electric bill and host the Emergency Shelter Partnership people in need. It is that support that enables us to do what God requires of us: to care for those whose needs are great and who need assistance in their day to day living, whether they live nearby or far away, are members of our church community or are not.

I ask that you prayerfully try to shift your perspective to see the world through the eyes of others and consider increasing your pledge this year, so that we can provide more for those who are in need, thereby transforming not only them and their lives but also us and our lives. And then, you can join our Confirmand in feeling good when helping others, and maybe, over time, it won't feel so weird.

I am so thankful and grateful to serve with you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Martha".