

Pastoral*e November 2014



This is my box. This is my box. I never travel without my box. So sings one of the three kings bringing gifts to baby Jesus in *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. We have such a treasure box here at church, though it is not filled with semi-precious stones, glittering beads or licorice! In fact, other than dust, there's nothing in it at all. But once there was.

We found the box in the wall of the vestry a few years ago. It is square, 3 inches on a side, made of wood, stained red and varnished, fastened with tiny brads, a slot in the top just large enough for a modern \$1 coin. The top is secured by two slotted screws.

The bottom has been doodled upon, in pencil, but you can also see written "No.16 Otis Nelson, Dea."—and, scrawled sideways, "Deac. Cobb." This box was already old in 1871, when the vestry was built, for these men were long gone.

It is a box for offerings, possibly for missions. This was something quite new for churches after about 1810. In those days our congregation took up monthly "collections" for Foreign and other missions. (Sound familiar?)

And how were we directing that money back then? The minutes of the 1853 Annual Meeting (December) provide a nice listing: Foreign Missions, \$100; American Bible Society, \$45; Maine Missionary Society (the forerunner of the Maine Conference), \$80; Contribution from Sewing Circle, \$47; from Female Donation Society, \$11; American Tract Society, \$22; American Seaman's Friend Society, \$19. If you believe inflation calendars, around \$9000 today.

Nathaniel Rideout's diaries from the same era mention his family's many contributions to missions, a few pennies at a time. That a family's cent or two was worth noting reveals that they were not merely "tipping," but giving, regularly, with care and consideration.

Cooperating to engage in mission with other congregations was the first programmatic priority to push for regular support from members. Music, a Library, Sunday Schools, new and multiple buildings and in-house mission efforts all followed.

Before 1800, church was a building and a settled pastor, things the Parish provided. Period. I find it instructive that the severing of parish control (and tax support), as much as it COST church members, freed them from the drag of the disinterested and downright antagonistic citizens, and allowed the gathered to BECOME what the members' faith directed—Church, this church. Imagine that!

Rev. Linda K. Gard