

The 59th annual Interfaith Thanksgiving service was held at the Federated Church of Christ in Brooklyn on Nov. 25. Co-sponsored by the Temple Beth Israel Preservation Society and the FCC, the event has celebrated the similarities of a diverse range of religious traditions since 1955.

The hour-long service borrowed prayers from the Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, Lakota, Micmac, Ojibwa and Sufi religious traditions. Hymns in English and Hebrew were interspersed with readings and prayers.

Rev. Mary Apicella welcomed a gathering of about 75 to the FCC's high-ceilinged sanctuary where wall sconces cast a soft light. A cornucopia filled with fruits and vegetables sat in front of a banner that read: This is the day the Lord has made. The FCC choir led the group in several songs, one which they sang in Hebrew.

People took to the podium and shared traditional prayers with the audience. Blue Skull Firewalker said it was the tradition of the Micmac to tell a story before sharing a prayer. He spoke about how weaving is like life. "We weave with individual threads, but only by weaving with all the colors of life can we come together and see a pattern," he said. "'That's what life is about. We need to work together, not pull each other apart.'"

"We need to hear the message of solidarity more than ever," said Rev. Jonathan Chapman, pastor of the Westfield Congregational Church, United Church of Christ in Danielson. "It reminds us of the things we share, what we have in common, particularly in light of the decision in Ferguson, Missouri."

Members of the congregation read aloud individual words of wisdom halfway through the program. Those words were written on cards and had been handed out to people as they arrived for the service. The list of approximately 45 words included "patience," "unselfishness," "kindness," and "forgiveness."

Prior to the closing prayer, people formed a circle of light in the sanctuary. The burning wick of one candle lit the candles of all the rest. When the lighting was complete, the choir sang "Let There be Peace on Earth."

"The promotion of peace is more important today than it's ever been," said Rosa Goldblatt. "Every day you open the newspaper and something horrible is happening somewhere. The more we know of each other, the less fear we have of each other, and I think that promotes peace."

"The basic tenets of all faiths are the same: to love God and to love your neighbor," said Camy Roach. "It's just such a wonderful thing to see everyone coming together like this every year. It's just beautiful. If everyone could do that, there wouldn't be a Ferguson."

"I'm making a choice," said choir member Mary Ann Thomen. "I have other choices, other options about how to spend my time. I'm making a statement by coming here."

"The society we live in continues to be so polarizing," said Apicella. "It's easy to not go outside our comfort zones and stay with the familiar, with people who look like us and worship like us. This tradition has shown it's more beautiful to live together and worship together. The things we have in common outnumber our differences."