

Dear Members and Friends,

As some of you know or have heard since Sunday, there was a disturbing message found in the sanctuary before worship. A whiteboard used by our music directors and stored in the chancel was used by someone to leave a threatening message and discovered just before the choir was preparing to practice. The Beverly Police were called and came immediately to assess the situation. The officer checked the building and grounds and recommended that we continue with the service and to not alarm those attending by making an announcement which would have also been live streamed on Zoom (and posted later on Facebook and Bev Cam).

While unsettling, we took that advice and proceeded with the service and the annual meeting thereafter. A number of steps were then taken immediately to find out what had happened and by late evening we had more of the story. The sign had been seen by our custodian when cleaning the sanctuary on Saturday but he had not thought to notify anyone. Clothing and trash found in the elevator were concerning but we later learned the custodian had placed the items there temporarily and that they were not the result of an intruder coming into the building as previously thought.

On Monday, the North Shore Christian School was immediately notified as well as one other building user who had been there on Friday night. The school began an internal investigation. Staff and lay leaders sought to get more answers before communicating about the incident to avoid causing unnecessary anxiety. However, the news of the police being called was published in the Salem News without any specifics.

On Tuesday, we heard it was possible that a student had written the message. And on Wednesday, we learned that was the case when Rev. Lisa met with the Head of the school. While the message sounded threatening, it was written by a student in response to a friend who had been teasing her during a rehearsal in the sanctuary and then left the message on the sign. The child now realizes the significant impact her youthful action had on a great many people and is thoroughly embarrassed and apologetic. We have all done things without thinking and hopefully this will be a good lesson for all with whom it is shared. However, in today's world such threatening messages can mean something entirely different than a child's innocent but impulsive messaging.

As a result, we are looking closely at our policies and procedures to ensure that we manage any future event using best practices to keep everyone safe and informed. All security practices and policies for communication are being reviewed with the goal of keeping our well-used building as safe as possible for all.

We thank all the members and friends of Second Church for their understanding and ask that you join in the many prayers being offered in these days for safety, understanding and peace.

Sincerely,

The Central Board

PS – Please feel free to contact any member of the Board, or Rev. Lisa if you have questions or feel the need to process these events.