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(Do not include this information in article unless is it included below)

For release: Week of August 22, 2021 - Thank you!

When the Reverends Kate Winters and Joel Krueger first came to The First Church in Belfast, United Church of Christ, in the fall of 2004, they were impressed by the picturesque and stately edifice in which the congregation gathered each Sunday. Built in 1818, it was meant to be an inspiring structure, one built on the likeness of the Congregational Church in Augusta at the time which sadly was struck by lightning and burned down in 1864. It was based on the architectural plans presented in Asher Benjamin's "The Country Builder's Assistant" published in 1797. The people of Belfast wanted their church building to be one that would attract both clergy and worshippers to their shores. It certainly did that and even to this day, the grand old First Church is seen as a landmark of our area, one of the most photographed buildings in Maine.

What surprised the new pastors in 2004 was that the beautiful steeple of the church was not lit up at night. At that time there was lighting illuminating the front of the church building but none in the steeple. There also seemed to be an impression among the local public that the old building was lifeless, from some long forgotten time. Rev. Winters found that many thought it was a museum, not realizing there was a lively spiritual community who gathered there every Sunday and the days in between. The pastors wondered, what if the steeple could shine with light at night? Would anyone notice? Would such a sign suggest to people that there was indeed something happening at the First Church?

Bringing this to the attention of the church Trustees and the Church Council, the pastors were able to have a test run with simple spot lights put up in the bell tower in the fall of 2008. The result was that church

members as well as other locals began to comment that the view of the church bell tower lit up at night was a beautiful, dignified, and reassuring sight. By the fall of 2009, permanent lights were installed.

Then, last year, after signs of chipping paint, rotting wood and ornamental finials falling from the tower during wind and heavy snow storms, the church Trustees decided it needed repair. Trustees Todd Hall and Trish Worth called upon Declan O'Connor to supervise the renovation project. Mid Maine Restoration professional steeplejacks was hired to do the work. During this time, from August to September, 2020, the steeple lights had to be removed.

The hope was to replace the lights with a new lighting system. There has been discussion about installing colored lights to be used for particular occasions such as Domestic Violence Awareness month in which case the steeple would shine purple. It could be a sign of the church's participation in the concerns of our community. But the cost, in the thousands of dollars, has been prohibitive. The suggestion was made to open up the opportunity to the public to help support this goal.

If you would like to see the lights returned to the First Church steeple please let us know by emailing our office at office@firstchurchinbelfast.org. If you would like to make a donation specific for this purpose please drop it off at the church office, or mail to the church at 8 Court St., Belfast, ME 04915. May the light of the steeple shine bright again and may the light of love shine forth from all of us!