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From the Pastor's Desk

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." Matthew 7:7

Greetings of Grace and Peace!

As we transition into a New Year, we are offered a new clean time frame to take up new habits and practices. It is a good opportunity to reflect on where we are in our lives, including our spiritual journeys. As we assess, we might want to make some commitments. I offer you the three suggestions I lifted in my December 27th sermon: reflect on your life and share your story, pray, and sing. Hopefully, you will take on all three.

Each of us has a journey that is not the same as anybody else's. While we might have the same family, go to the same places, and have many similar experiences, each one speaks to our soul differently. As you enter this year, I suggest you might take time to review your life in decades with the following questions in mind:

Who was important to you during this decade? Why?

What did they offer that was meaningful and memorable to you?

What did you learn?

How has it (experience, lesson, or person) impacted your life?

Set aside a time to be quiet. Jot down what comes to your mind.

Reflect on the questions above. If tears come, let them. But discern: Are they tears of joy and/or of being overwhelmed with

love, care, awe, or are they from a deep grief that still needs to be healed? Sharing your story allows you to hear the words which often bring meaning and healing to yourself as you pass it on to another. Our stories become a gift.

Second Suggestion: Pray! We are all called to pray without ceasing as Paul writes in 1 Thess. 5:17. The real question is, *how*? As far back as the sixth century, monks would practice Paul's command by praying the **Jesus Prayer**, "*Lord, have mercy on me a sinner.*" It has been said that one monk aimed to pray the prayer 1000 times a day. I often guide folks into forming their own version of this prayer, but as we begin this year, I suggest we all use the same following prayer:

"Lord, help me to know you and love you more each day."

Simple enough, but effective. Pray it as often as you can during the day. Pray it whether you feel like it or not. Then, please share with me and others how you see God moving in your lives. God promises, "...when we seek, we will find." (Matthew 7:7)

Thirdly: Sing! Music speaks to our bodies through vibrations and wakes up parts that are sleeping or sluggish. As parts are opened by your participation and permission, the Holy Spirit can move through readily, bringing comfort, rejuvenation, and healing. Singing fills our souls and connects us to one another. It brings joy! Three of the suggested movies during our Advent / Christmas Series were based on music. It is an incredible gift. So, Sing! Be filled! Be healed! Be joyful! Be moved!

In Christ's Light and Love,

Pastor Pat



From the Deacons' Bench

CHRISTMAS WREATH MESSAGE

In the darkest days of the year, the Divine Spirit still shines bright. I've included a hopeful prayer from Richard and Connie. Richard is a boyhood friend of nearly 80 years.

Dearest Friends and Family,

We are pleased to send all of you this picture photo of our wreath of health and happiness and well-wishes for Christmas and the New Year. The wreath hangs on the front door of our home with its lovely circle of colored lights.



Our hope and our prayer is that it may also hang on the Secret Door of your hearts and minds with its enduring message of Love, Beauty, Joy and Peace this day and all the days of our lives.

So May It Be,
Richard and Connie

And so may it be.....Dave Spencer, Deacon.

A Word from the Co-Chair of the Board of Directors

Back in February of 2020, word started spreading of a new novel coronavirus, Covid-19. It had been discovered in China and was starting to spread creating predictions of a pandemic. In its infancy, little was known, except that it was potentially fatal. It did prove to be so, as it progressed through many countries, as well as our own, wreaking havoc, mostly on the infirm, but proving to be indiscriminate. This led to shutdowns of many places in the country, including Massachusetts. Schools, as well as businesses, were advised to shut down or limit activities at a minimum. The leaders of FCC reacted by conducting Zoom & phone conferences associated with recommendations being made by our Government and UCC & UMC denominations. We took it seriously and voted to follow guidelines set forth by these different groups. We shut down physically meeting for worship. We recommended that the Congregation follow the worship through cable networks or use the links which were sent out weekly. In the beginning, it was a struggle putting together online worship that could help fulfill the spiritual needs of our Congregation. We grew in this service modestly and continue to do so today. We learned about “Livestreaming” on Facebook and have some success in that evolution, considering the volunteers and lack of technological understanding. We made it through the Spring and then, with regulations partially lifted, we moved worship outdoors, wearing masks and social distancing. The Lord was with us, and unbelievably, we had perfect weather every Sunday throughout the Summer. The crowds were small and very respectful of our time together. The last few Sundays leading to Fall became crisp and chilly but did not dampen the spirits of those who enjoyed the outdoor participation.

As we moved indoors, we followed recommendations and guidance from science, CDC, organizations referenced above, and common sense. This, along with growing knowledge regarding Livestreaming, has enabled us to reach out with the purpose of spiritual nourishment for our community. However, with the fulfilled predictions of spiking cases and the taxing of our first

responders and medical facilities during the month of December due from holiday gatherings around Thanksgiving, we are being forced to rethink how we operate. There are further predictions of greater spiking associated with the Christmas holiday as this is ongoing. Now I know that this has not impacted us at FCC directly; however, we still have an obligation to follow the guidance. If for no other reason to help the first responders and medical personnel which we so count on to get us through this trying time. We have an obligation to protect our Minister and her family. She has expressed to me her goal to fulfill her ministry but also her concerns for herself and her family. This is real... We will again be following the guidelines and resort to remote participation during January and reevaluate that position during the month or as the guidance changes. I am very thankful for the patience you have all exhibited during this pandemic and ask that you hang on just a little longer. We will make it through this **together** and that is an unscientific prediction.

Yours in the Spirit of Christ
Jack Germain, Co-Chair Board of Directors

Deacon Server for the Month

January

Linda Hornig

Christian Education

The last few months have been challenging for everyone. We are grateful for the children and how well they have adapted to the new challenges. The youth enjoyed participating in our Christmas program. While not the program we are used to, it was delightful for the children to perform knowing that everyone would see their talents.

We look forward to seeing everyone in the new year and pray for better circumstances and health for everyone.

Blessings,
Kristi & Laurie

Missions Update



We would like to extend our gratitude to everyone who donated to Maryanne's Kids. We were able to bring Christmas joy to the three children we adopted for Christmas as well as many more children with all the extra gifts that were donated. Mary Anne's kids were very grateful. We have been a supporter of Maryanne's Kids since their conception in 2000.



Kristi Tessier, Missions Chair

January Birthdays

Birthday Greetings to the following adult members of our church who celebrate birthdays in January.



Gail Banning	01/03
Dennis Chaffee Sr	01/04
Albert Jones	01/06
Geraldine Spear	01/06
Donald Ryan	01/07
Lisa Wyman	01/10
Steven Safford	01/13
Madison Regnier	01/13
Marilyn Connor	01/18
Dennis Connor	01/18
Nicholas Hummel	01/19
Edith Casey	01/20
Susan Quill	01/20
John Panek	01/20
Joan Harris	01/24
Richard Nelson	01/24
Richard Taylor	01/27
Paul Willoughby	01/30
Rosemary DiSimoni	01/31





Prayer Corner



Evie Meacham
Ingrid & Beth (Schwabe)
Bob Schoolcraft
Audrey Burger
John (Jack) Bennett
Janet Brehaut
Beverly Pease
Winnie
Don Facey
Fran Brown
Frank & Phyllis Watson
Bob Green
Judy

Bonnie Watson
Otto Kern
Carol Darnley
Gwen Wills
Lelum
Jackie Prior
Dennis Connor
Jeffrey Howe
Edith
Earl Schofield
Christopher
Josh G. & Family

For shut-ins and those who are isolated
For first responders & healthcare workers
For those in rehab centers & nursing homes
For the homeless in the winter months
For our country
For all world leaders

Sympathy To...

Family & friends of
Rev. Robert G. Van Gorder, who passed away
on December 9, 2020. Rev. Van Gorder was a
Pastor at FCC for 10 years from 1959- 1969.



Family & friends of Christopher Griggs, who passed away on
December 26th.

Thank you to so many members who have contributed to make our church so rich by using their gifts:

- Readers for the 25 stories of Christmas on our church Facebook page.
- To Kristi who recorded various readers and thought of the idea for our Facebook Stories of Christmas.
- For your generosity of gifts to MaryAnne's Kids.
- To those who sang in Advent worship services: Miyani Tessier, Bobbi Schofield, Joshua Sterling, Matt Sterling
- To the newly formed Bell Choir: Beth Algie, Ellie Soucy, Kim Cummins, Dominic Tessier, Penny Dibble, Wayne Miller Fernandes, and Director, Karen Kielb.
- We thank Wellspring United Methodist Church for the bell donation and for the leadership of Karen Kielb to make the Bell Choir a reality.
- To Jack Germain and Dave Kruger for videotaping our service weekly.
- For our Christian Education Co-Coordinators who put together a spectacular Christmas program and the Tessier Family children who shared their musical gifts in the service: Dominic, Miyani, and Malaysia.
- To the Deacons and the many unnamed who assist to make our church run smoothly.

I am the Church! You are the Church! We are the church together!

Congregational Corner

We invite our congregational members to be part of our newsletter monthly. Have you read a good book that you want to recommend? Write a review and send it to the office and we will include it in our newsletter. Do you have a painting you want to share? Have good news you want others to know about? A poem you have written? (Thank you to Carol Darnley for sharing her beautiful poem written after the tornado in 2011) Let's stay connected and share!



Ode to the Gentle Giants

(A song for the trees struck down by the June 1st 2011 tornado)

*Once gentle giants stood graceful and strong
Havens of hope in a world filled with wrong;
Giving homes to God's creatures, cradling their young;
Playgrounds for frolics; shade from hot sun;
Nurturing all life 'neath their sheltering arms;
Protecting and comforting, safe from all harm.*

*Giants, struck down now by spiraling storms;
Bending and broken, twisted and torn;
Pierced by shards of violent wind;
Painful moans echo deep within
Their tangled bodies, clutching the earth.
Life's essence seeps back to the source of their birth.*

*Now empty spaces reveal big sky.
New homes have been found in the forests nearby.
New nests have been built to cradle the young.
New trails blazed for frolic and fun.
'Though giants are gone, their essence remains:
Reseeding, renewing; they will live again!*

*Life's cycle repeating; God's plan will unfold.
New trees now spring forth from the seeds of the old.
Small seedlings are nurtured by still living trees;
Bathed in sweet rains, kissed by soft breeze.
Tiny hands, spreading fingers reach for the sun;
Living proof for the mourners: Death has not won!*

Carol Darnley, July 2011

In Person Worship

Due to the Massachusetts Governor's regulations effective December 26, 2020 and the recommendations of both the United Church of Christ and the United Methodist Church, in person worship will be suspended until further notice. The Board of Directors will monitor and evaluate the situation. Any change of decision will be announced in the weekly news. Leadership understands the desire for community and it is difficult to make these decisions; balancing our need for connection while also keeping our pastor and congregational members safe. We will offer a new platform for connection during worship time. Each week, the weekly news will include a link to connect with the 10 AM worship. You simply need to click the link and be connected. You will also be able to see others that are worshipping at their homes. The worship service will continue to be on Facebook Live at 10 AM, and posted on Facebook and the website for viewing at your convenience. The weekly bulletin is posted on our website so you may participate more fully.



Amazing Grace Stewardship Campaign

Thank you to all who have responded to the *Amazing Grace* Stewardship Campaign. Our church continues in the right way of growing spiritually which is reflected by your generous and dependable giving. If you have not taken the opportunity to respond yet, please do so ASAP, so we can prepare our budget for the upcoming year. Your commitment allows us to be the hands and heart of Christ unto the world and to follow Jesus Commission: *Make disciples of all nations*. (Matthew 28: 19a). God remains generous to us and this is one way of praising and saying, "Thank you" to God.

Finance News

Good News!! We will be saving close to \$300.00 in 2021 by not ordering new envelopes for our weekly and monthly donors. We have enough sets of envelopes left over from last year to use this year! The dates on the envelopes will be off by a year, less a day. No Problem, right! We can all handle that. Thanks for being so understanding.

Janet Libby

*Recap of Advent Songs of Resistance and Movie Suggestions**

Each Week in worship during Advent we shared in a *Carol of Resistance* and recommended a movie to go along with the weekly theme. I have included the hymn and a short explanation of how they were used as resistance. The movie suggestions are also included. Perhaps during these days of “isolation” due to COVID, you might want to watch them if you haven’t already.

1st Sunday of Advent Hope

Carol of Resistance *“I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day”*

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote this poem at Harvard on Christmas Day in 1863 during the heart of the Civil War. His wife had died tragically in a fire and he had just found out that his son had been injured as a soldier for the Union. He heard the sound of bells and began to write, spurred on by his sorrow at the state of humankind:

*“And in despair, I bowed my head:
‘There is no peace on earth,’ I said,
‘For hate is strong and mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good will to [all].”*

Suggested Movie: *“Defiant Requiem”*

2nd Sunday of Advent Love

Carol of Resistance *“It Came Upon the Midnight Clear”*

Our Carol of Resistance was written in 1849 by a Massachusetts Unitarian minister, Rev. Edmund Hamilton Sears. One verse has been left out of several hymnals over the decades since then but the new hymnal, *Glory to God*, restores this powerful verse that refers to the love-song of the angels being drowned out by our warring nature:

*Yet with the woes of sin and strife
the world has suffered long;*

*beneath the angel-strain have rolled
two thousand years of wrong;
and we at war on earth hear not
the love-song which they bring;
O hush the noise and cease the strife,
and hear the angels sing.*

Suggested Movie “*Girls on the Wall*”

3rd Sunday of Advent Joy

Carol of Resistance “*Ode to Joy*” (“*Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee*”)
With words by Billy Bragg

As you will witness in our documentary this week, *Beethoven's Ninth Symphony*, which is the basis of the tune for our hymn “*Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee*,” has been a powerful witness to the human spirit to overcome adversity in many instances around the globe. British punk rock star, Billy Bragg, once wrote an alternative translation of the original German choral score for a school teacher to teach the children in her classroom, and it soon became a popular anthem, even being performed for the Queen. In these words you can hear the call to resist division, to raise our voices, to “furnish every heart with joy and banish all hatred for good.”

*“See now like a Phoenix rising
from the rubble of the war
hope of ages manifested
peace and freedom evermore.
Brothers, sisters stand together,
raise your voices now as one.
Though by history divided,
reconciled in unison.*

*Throw off now the chains of ancient
bitterness and enmity.
And in hand let's walk together
on the path of liberty.
Hark...a new dawn is breaking;
raise your voices now as one.*

*Though by history divided,
reconciled in unison.*

Movie Suggestion: *“Following the Ninth”*

4th Sunday of Advent Peace

Carol of Resistance *“Go Tell It On The Mountain”*

Our Carol of Resistance this week is part of the repertoire of Christmas songs that were created by people who endured brutal hardships as the result of African colonization and North American slavery. But, though people of African descent were ripped from much of their cultural heritage, they maintained their heritage of group song, punctuated by West African rhythms and vocal stylings. Of course the safest thing for oppressed peoples to sing about was the religious beliefs that, first forced upon them by their oppressors, later gave many hope in the midst of suffering. *“Go Tell It On The Mountain”* is probably the best-known African American Christmas song and the words “seeker” and “watchman” are thought by some to have been code words for those seeking freedom on the Underground Railroad. It was made popular by the *Fisk Jubilee Singers* in the 19th century as these college students—themselves freed slaves—traveled the country to raise money and awareness. They were turned away from hotels, railway waiting rooms, and even some churches because of their color. As we sing, let us honor them, honor all who have endured slavery and the continued systemic racism caused by slavery.

*“Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere.
Go tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born.”*

... indeed that the Prince of Peace that calls us
to break the chains of oppression... *is born!*

Movie Suggestion: *“Sweet Honey In The Rock: Raise Your Voice!”*

Sunday after Christmas Believe This: The Time Has Come

Carol of Resistance *“Do You Hear What I Hear?”*

This carol was written in 1962 by Noel Regney and Gloria Shayne at the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Inspired by seeing babies pushed in strollers in New York City while the dire threat of nuclear war loomed, Noel wrote, “said the night wind to the little lamb,” and “pray for peace, people everywhere.” The “star dancing in the night with a tail as big as a kite” can be interpreted as the star of Bethlehem but also what a nuclear missile looks like in flight. The composers said in an interview later that it was difficult to actually sing the song that year without crying. Indeed, our prayers for peace continue and the need to protect the children of the world and secure a future for them are as dire as ever. As the last song in our series, let us sing this Carol of Resistance, “a song high above the trees” with our voices “big as the sea.”



Movie: “*The Singing Revolution*”

* © Worship Design Studio by Marcia McFee. Used, adapted, and live-streamed with permission. www.worshipdesignstudio.com.

Financial Tip on Saving Money

Are you mandated to withdraw from you IRA due to age (this year increased to 72 yrs.)? Do you pledge to the church or desire to?

If so, instructing the holder of your IRA distribution to directly pay the amount, full or partial, to The Federated Community Church or another charity, will allow you to give and not have to claim the amount as income. If you are in a tax bracket, it will save you money and allow you to share your blessings.

Blessings in the New Year!

Wash your hands often

Stay Masked

Stay distanced; yet connected-Join us for Sunday Worship

10:00 AM on Facebook Live



Christmas Eve Service

Amid the doom and gloom of the weather on Christmas Eve, approximately forty folks gathered to welcome the light of Christ into their hearts and affirm their commitment to make God's love shine through their lives. Our newly formed Bell Choir made their first public appearance during the worship. While the setting was not the normal quiet, safe, reflective environment of the sanctuary, it was probably closer to the noise of the first night when Christ was born.