

The Bell Tower

Newsletter of the First Congregational Church of Hatfield

2018

July

No. 6

Separation as a Good Thing

This month our nation remembers, celebrates and reaffirms our founding on July 4, 1776. We have all learned since our days in grade school that Thomas Jefferson was the principal author of the Declaration of Independence. In parts that are seldom read any longer, Jefferson goes into great detail to justify the “right of the people to alter or to abolish [a government], and to institute new government ...” He argues this point based on the premise that governments derive “their just powers from the consent of the governed.” This was radical in the late 18th century, and for most of the world it still is today.

Equally revolutionary was the logical step that preceded and supported the radicalism of American democracy, that “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights ...” The Creator had been used to legitimize the divine right of kings, and now Jefferson and everyone who signed below the famous signature of John Hancock were turning to God to overthrow the notion of human inequality.

God was the guarantor of human rights, according to Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence. Religion was not.

There are four panels that surround the statue of Thomas Jefferson in his Washington, D.C. Memorial. The first etches in stone some of the words of the Declaration. The second panel insists on freedom of religion. Jefferson’s words praise intellectual freedom and warn that a forced religiosity not only constricts human thought, but that it is “a departure from the plan of the Holy Author of our religion.” Therefore, says Jefferson, no one shall be compelled to support a state religion, and no one shall suffer on account of a disregard for religion.

This is the famous tenet of our nation known as the separation of church and state, and again it is based on God. A state sponsored religion serves the mechanisms and machinations of the state far more than it serves God or the faithful. When state and church converge, both suffer.

In Colonial America, both Rhode Island and Connecticut were founded due to religious intolerance. Massachusetts was founded by Puritans and Pilgrims who faced religious persecution. Instead of

learning from their experiences, they created a state religion here that forced dissenters to seek religious freedom elsewhere.

Rev. Thomas Hooker led about 100 members of his Congregational Church in Cambridge out into the wilderness in 1636 as they sought religious freedom. Specifically, Hooker preached against the law that the right to vote should be restricted to church members. 140 years before the Declaration of Independence, Rev. Hooker and the others who eventually founded Hartford and the state of Connecticut were insisting upon the separation of church and state as a way to protect both. Some of these pioneers then traveled up the Connecticut River and were instrumental in the founding of Hatfield. Their spirit is part of our congregation’s history. *

A fellow Founding Father of Jefferson’s, then an ardent political foe of Jefferson’s, and lastly a dear friend of Jefferson’s until they died on the same day, John Adams, once wrote: “As the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion ...” John Adams was a man of faith, as was Jefferson, and both embraced a faith based on Christ, but both realized that a person’s faith cannot be compelled and that a state sponsored church diminishes both the vitality of that church while simultaneously threatening the welfare of the state. The separation of church and state again protected both church and state.

This does not force the church to be apolitical. This grants the church the freedom to speak the gospel to whomever the government may be and in response to whatever it may try to do. This allows the church to fulfill the prophetic role of speaking truth to power. A free church must speak out when the government needs a conscience. A state church is confined to government support. A free church is beholden to God and those “unalienable rights” that God grants to “all men,” to all people, and which stands as the foundation of our great American tradition of democracy. On the Fourth of July, let us be grateful for the blessings this nation offers to us and the world, but let us be vigilant as church so that we may speak truth to power as the gospel and the Spirit require. Patriotism requires this of us.

JULY EVENTS

Mon. 2 nd	Bible study group will meet in the church parlor from 7 – 8:00pm.
Wed. 4 th	Fourth of July.
Sun. 8 th	Volunteers needed after our morning Service to help clear out the dining hall in preparation for work on the floor.
Thur. 12 th	Volunteers needed to help at the Western Massachusetts Food Bank.
Sun. 15 th	Volunteers needed after our morning Service to help return items to the dining hall.
Mon. 16 th	Bible study group will meet in the church parlor from 7 – 8:00pm.
Sat. 21 st	Water Palooza sponsored by Heads Up for the youth of Hatfield, church open throughout the event.
Sun. 22 nd	Benevolence Committee will meet at 11:20am.
Mon. 30 th	Bible study group will meet in the church parlor from 7 – 8:00pm.

REGULAR GATHERINGS

Sundays: **Worship Service at 9:30 am in July and August.** Sunday School at 9:45 am. Chat and Coffee at 10:30am.

Tuesdays: Yoga classes are offered every Tuesday in the church parlor at 5:30pm.

Wednesdays: Hatha Yoga classes take place every Wednesday at 6:00pm.

Saturdays: AA meets at the church every Saturday at noon.

RE-DESIGNED WEBSITE COMING SOON

The church has hired a professional consultant to build an improved website for us with integral links to Social media platforms such as Facebook... etc..... Easier to navigate and boldly send our message to our members and the community. Anita Wilson, Mark Gelotte and Rev. Randy are working with Rocket Strategies on this project. Please speak to any one of us about this project. It should be up and running sometime this summer.

BIBLE STUDY GROUP

We are moving forward, slowly but surely, with our reading of Mark's Gospel. I appreciate Mark's authentic voice. Jesus' humanity shines through in Mark's words, His divinity does not blind us to the realness of Jesus' human experience. Jesus is us in Mark. This earliest Gospel is also honest enough to portray the struggle to believe. Mark's community is an isolated island of faith in the midst of a sea of other believers. They must have appreciated the strangeness of their ability to believe when so many others did not. Faith was a personal decision embraced, not an obvious, unavoidable force. Mark's Gospel lays out the journey of choosing Jesus in the full realization that the words convey the Word, that in the story we encounter Jesus directly, that we walk with those witnesses of old. This is why I find Mark so compelling. I invite you to check out the blog on our soon to be updated website to read an example of one of our recent Bible study discussions. The Gospel and the Bible study discussion are part of the amazing truth that "God is still speaking."

ANNUAL MEETING MASSACHUSETTS CONFERENCE

The Tri-Conference Annual Meeting was held in mid-June at the Mass Mutual Center in Springfield. The gathered delegates represented some 127,000 members of the UCC in Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Amy Novak and I attended the New Delegates' orientation meeting since this was my first venture into UCC Conference polity. It was stressed to us, and I was impressed by this, that we were to gather as the Body of Christ, that each of us was being called upon to listen to and act on behalf of the Holy Spirit. We were not to act individually, and we were not expected to only repeat local church decisions; we were all encouraged to be open to the inspiration of the gathering of God's people.

At the Spring Super Saturday gathering we had attended the talk about the proposal to create a new Conference so Amy and I instead attended the "Response to Bullying" hearing. This proposal (<https://www.macucc.org/files/files/documentsnews/anti-bullying-2018.pdf>) complements the work of Heads-Up here in Hatfield, and we will follow-up on this in the near future.

After dinner, I was able to participate in a beautifully designed Worship Service that featured the Rev. Traci Blackmon as the keynote speaker. Here's the link to her sermon: <https://www.macucc.org/newsdetail/blackmon-you-have-to-get-your-feet-wet-11523861> I don't need to say anything else about this. She says it all.



Rev. Randy and Amy Novak listening to Rev. Sherril Willis at the Bullying hearing at the Tri-Conference Annual Meeting.

See us at the back of the room during the New Delegates orientation meeting?



Here's the band that played during worship, and the definitive drummer I mentioned in church.

Rev. Jim Antal's, past Conference Minister, retirement party Friday evening. Holding a Goose Island IPA, which he sipped all night, but still cool.



Revs. Sherril Willis, Liza Knapp and Randy Calvo, and Amy blocked from view by these un-camera-shy clergy.

Oh wait, there's our Amy now free of all those clergy who were hogging the camera.



At our closing worship, all assembled shared the church's benediction upon the retiring Rev. Jim Antal and upon the newly elected Conference Minister, the Rev. Don Remick.

On Saturday, the morning worship segued into the "Together as One" proposal to unite the three state Conferences. Each Conference then broke-out into their own plenary sessions. Each Conference was tasked with voting on this proposal, and each Conference voted in the affirmative by overwhelming majorities. After lunch, the delegates were assigned to Listening Sessions with Conference Board members so that they would be aware of the expectations, questions and concerns of the delegates.

We then finished with worship. We acknowledged the new leadership team and thanked the previous. It was quite moving to have all of the delegates gather around the retired Massachusetts Conference Minister, the Rev. Jim Antal, so that we could share our blessings with him for his work for the church and for his future retirement. It had the feel of what I imagine the earliest church would have practiced when they called, Ordained and acknowledged their pastors.

Amy and I came home excited about possibilities. We hope to share our thoughts with the congregation in person on Sunday, July 29th, right after that morning's Service.

BENEVOLENCE NEWS

The Benevolence Committee has started a fund called *Kindness to Kids*. It will be administered through the Hatfield Elementary School's nurse. As occasional needs may arise, such as a student who may need a pair of boots for winter or another who may need a coat, we will try to step in and help. The students will need to be participating in the subsidized lunch program at the school. Some of these needs slip through the cracks and that is where we can step in and hopefully make a difference. If you would like to contribute to this work, please contact Carolyn Forsyth.

Also, Benevolence is planning a Spaghetti Supper for September 8th at 6PM to benefit the Kindness to Kids fund. Please mark your calendars now so that you will be able to attend, and try to share the invite with others. It is for a great cause. Thank you.

VIEW CHURCH SERVICES ON-LINE AND ON TV

We are airing our Services a couple of times a month on public access television. They take place on alternate Sundays. This allows people to see what happens inside our church building and it also reaches into the homes of people who are unable to be with us in church. The recorded Services air on Hatfield Community Television on Saturdays and Sundays at 8 am and 4 pm. It may also be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mGizNLvhYAM> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wuPwD129oTA>. We could use the help of a few more volunteers to operate the camera on a rotating basis during the Services. If you could help in this way, please speak to Rev. Randy.

JUNE FOOD DRIVE THANK YOU

Thank you to everyone who donated to the June food drive to benefit the "Hunger Does Not Take the Summer Off" collection for the Hampshire County Survival Center. 325 pounds of non-perishable food items were collected along with \$55 in monetary donations, plus there is still more that has been promised that will be picked-up and delivered in the near future.

FOOD BANK VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers from our church gather with Linda Milewski at the Western Mass Food Bank each second Thursday of the month to help this worthwhile organization. If you can share three hours of your time, it will benefit those of our neighbours who do not have the ability to put enough food on their tables.

CONSIDER MEMBERSHIP AT HATFIELD CONGREGATIONAL

If you feel you would like to be a formal member of the church, it begins with a group meeting with Rev. Calvo and members of the Board of Deacons. We talk about the church, its organization, how things work, and our core values and covenants. We will hold this orientation meeting this summer. Talk with Reverend Calvo or Amy Novak of the Board of Deacons if you are interested.

CAN WE INTEREST YOU?

On the table by the church hall entrance to the Sanctuary are sign-up sheets for Sunday flower offerings and coffee and chat hostings. The flowers will be placed on the Communion Table and the donation will be printed in the bulletin and announced from the pulpit. Our Sunday morning coffee and chats are a wonderful opportunity to gather together after worship as friends and neighbors. To host does not entail feeding us all until we are full. It is rather an opportunity to linger over a cup of coffee or tea and chat. Thanks for helping.

LOBSTERFEST

The 22nd annual Lobsterfest is scheduled for Saturday, August 4, 2018. **Please save the date!** This is a scrumptious meal, steamed lobsters with ALL the fixings, ready for you to take out and enjoy. Plan a backyard lobster party for your family and friends, or volunteer to lend a hand at this important church fundraiser.

SHARE AN INVITATION

If someone you know is not attending church anywhere, please share an invitation with them to come and join us at Hatfield Congregational Church because "Whoever you are, and wherever you are on life's journey, you are welcome here."

CONTACT INFO: HATFIELD CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

Website: www.hatfieldchurch.org

Facebook: www.facebook.com/First-Congregational-Church-of-Hatfield-UCC

Pastor: Rev. Randy Calvo 413-824-1630 randyc1897@gmail.com

Committee Chairpersons:

Christian Education, Anita Wilson 413 247-5229

Music, Anthony Tracia 781 738-6284

Real Folks Society, Martha Zigmont 413 247-5453

Benevolence, Carolyn Forsyth

Deacons, Amy Novak 413 210-3965

Trustees, Jonathan Bardwell 413-530-6262

Church Moderator, Glenda Flynn 413 247-5891



* https://archive.org/stream/ahistoryhatfiel00wellgoog/ahistoryhatfiel00wellgoog_djvu.txt