

The Bell Tower

Newsletter of the First Congregational Church of Hatfield, UCC

2023

August

No. 8

Who We Are (Part 3)

Last month as we celebrated Independence Day we mentioned the willingness of our Congregational forebears to embrace innovation. They challenged and changed everything they inherited as church, and then they passed this trait of innovation on to our emerging nation. This month I would like to talk about passing innovation on to the much younger United Church of Christ (UCC) denomination.

The UCC takes justifiable pride in its embrace of innovation. Please click on this link to see the most notable: www.ucc.org/ucc-firsts. Within the constituent bodies that pre-date the UCC and then within the UCC itself, we find the first ordained Black American pastor in 1785, the first woman pastor in 1853, the ordination of the first openly gay minister in 1972, and the recognition of marriage equality in 2005. These are innovations that many other churches still will not embrace.

Often this hesitancy is bolstered by biblical argument, but here is a fundamental biblical argument for innovation. Jesus did not fulfill the Old Testament expectations of the Messiah. If He had, His Jewish contemporaries would have flocked to Him in massive numbers. This obviously did not happen. Jesus' person and ministry were an unexpected innovation.

In our Bible study group (check below for when we meet in August), we are reading Acts of the Apostles. This is Luke's Volume II. His Gospel was Volume I and Acts then shares with us the story of how the first followers of Jesus continued His ministry.

It is clear in the careful telling of Acts that disturbances between Jewish and Gentile Christians could not be whitewashed. The tension remains even though Luke is telling an intentionally stylized version of church history. This tension arises as Gentiles begin to outnumber Jewish converts. The ones holding on to the past are confronted with the innovation that allowed Christianity to become a world religion.

What is rather amazing is that the apostles, the disciples of the historic Jesus, are the ones reticent to change. Understandably so – to an extent. They were the witnesses of Jesus of Nazareth's ministry and Jesus was thoroughly Jewish. It is wholly understandable that the ones who witnessed the historical Jesus, also including James the brother of Jesus who was head of the Jerusalem church, would advocate for continuing His Jewish practices and identity.

But then there is Paul. He was a violent adversary of the church until his powerful conversion on the Road to Damascus. When he returns to Jerusalem, everything becomes unsettled. That is until the believers sent him back home to Tarsus and then peace returns. (Acts 9:30-31) The innovator is dispatched, but peace in Jerusalem may equate with dormancy.

It is different in Antioch. Outsiders preach Jesus to Gentiles who become followers in great numbers so much so that the followers in Antioch are the first ones named *Christians*. Jerusalem gets nervous and sends Barnabas. He must have been impressed for he travels to Tarsus to bring Paul back to Antioch, and with him all that innovative energy. (Acts 11:19-26)

In Jerusalem, there was James, the apostles and elders, all firmly ensconced in what was. Antioch was not Jerusalem for "in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers." (Acts 13:1) These indicate an openness to innovation through ongoing inspiration and study. While Antioch was at worship one day, they felt inspired to consecrate Barnabas and Paul for missionary work, and "they laid their hands on them and sent them off." (Acts 13:3) This leads to the most successful evangelization in the history of Christianity. It was based on an innovative community's impetus and on Paul's innovation of emphasizing the singular importance of Jesus, negating the need for the old traditions associated with the Jewish faith.

The UCC embraces this biblical tradition of innovation. We are proudly a church of firsts.

As we look back at our racial, gender and orientation innovations, we see that we have created a way forward for others to follow. And this is

nothing more than a faithful adherence to the examples of Jesus and the earliest church as found in the biblical model.

AUGUST EVENTS

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| Thurs. 3 rd | Rev. Randy will attend the HEADS Up meeting at 6:30pm. |
| Tue. 8 th | Online <i>Exploring the Bible</i> study group from 7 – 8:00pm. |
| Sun. 13 th | Rev. Randy will be away on vacation. Rev. Bill Ault will be our Guest Minister. |
| Mon. 14 th | CROP Hunger Walk Recruitment Rally at the Orange United Methodist Church at 6:30pm. Monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees at 7:00pm. |
| Tue. 15 th | Monthly meeting of the Board of Deacons in person at the church at 6:30pm. |
| Wed. 16 th | Church Council will meet at 7:00pm. |
| Tue. 22 nd | Online Bible study group will meet from 7 – 8:00pm. |

REGULAR GATHERINGS

Sundays: Worship Service begins at 9:30am online and in person. Sunday School begins after the children’s sermon during the worship Service.

Mondays: The Joyful Ringers Bell Choir rehearses from 6 - 8:00pm.

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

Thursdays: Choir rehearses in the parlor at 7:00pm, except July and August.

JOYFUL RINGERS BELL CHOIR

The Joyful Ringers rehearse on Mondays from 6 – 8:00pm. Anyone who is interested is welcome to become a part of the Bell Choir. Younger or older, church member or bell enthusiast, experienced or novice, we would love it if you would come forward and add the gift of more music to our sanctuary. If you may be interested, please reach out to Rev. Randy at randyc1897@gmail.com or Sue M., the Music Committee Chair.



Also, we do have a set of chimes that the children may play at worship. If your daughter or son may be interested in learning how to play the chimes, we would love to hear from you. It may even be fun for them.

BIBLE STUDY GROUP and THEN WHAT?

Our online Bible study group is reading from the Acts of the Apostles and then the Gospel of John. If you would like to join us as we read of the early days of the church and then of John’s unique take on Jesus’ life and ministry, we would love to have you join us. Let’s read, study and discuss the book that literally has changed the world. Send an email to randyc1897@gmail.com for the login. We meet on alternate weeks for one hour.

When we complete John’s Gospel, we will have made our way through a survey of each of the Bible’s books, 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New. It has taken quite a while, but we were not rushed. We had no deadline. A survey course skims the text, highlighting the themes not focusing on every verse. My question is what to do next.

If you were thinking about something that may interest you enough to give a couple of hours a month to an online study/discussion, would it be delving more deeply into a given book in the Bible, talking about church history, maybe a book club, or maybe something completely different? Would you share those thoughts with Rev. Randy? I’m just wondering what direction to go once we finish our survey of the Bible. Thanks.

CROP HUNGER WALK RALLY

The CROP Hunger Walk will take place in Orange on Sunday, October 1st. However, before we get to that point, we need to start thinking about Church World Services. A Orange Methodist Church on the 14th. donation envelopes for our team collecting donations, and we will

The CROP Walks were the first copied by many other worthy causes, It is important for people to see in



fundraising for the good work of Recruitment Rally will be held at the At this time, we will receive members so that they may begin receive advertising materials. “walks.” The model has been but the CROP Walks are the oldest. various hosting communities that

people are out walking in solidarity with people in need throughout the world. The slogan is “We walk because they walk.” In many poor countries, people must walk long distances for water, food, medical treatment and the such. The walks are reminders to everyone who sees them of these too often forgotten populations.

Would you like to be a part of our congregation’s team? Would you like to walk with hundreds of others who are committed to the good work of helping people in need. It is an uplifting experience.

Would you also consider making a donation to this worthy organization? More information on this will follow in next month’s newsletter following the Recruitment Rally.

These are the good things that churches should do.

SUMMER SUNDAYS?

The Deacons have been discussing ways in which to make summer worship a bit less formal. There may be interactive sermons. We could ask people to share their faith stories. We could invite speakers from the Food Bank, Fisher Home, HEADS Up, Prospect Meadow Farm, or the CROP Hunger Walk. If you have suggestions, please share them with Rev. Randy or any of our Deacons. Also, if it is too uncomfortably hot or humid for you on any given Sunday, please remember there is always the Zoom option each and every weekend.

HOMECOMING SUNDAY

Please mark September 10th on your calendars so that you can attend Homecoming Sunday. On this day, our worship Service will begin at the special time of 11:00am. It will be followed by a church gathering so that we can mingle with one another as we transition from summer to fall. This is a perfect opportunity to get back in the swing of church life if that may have dropped off over the summer. It’s also a wonderful occasion to invite someone you know to come to church with you and let them get to know us at worship and in person. I know there are many out there who do not attend church anywhere. Maybe they are fine without sharing in what church offers, but some of them may find in church a true blessing. I do hope you’ll think about coming and also inviting others as well to our Homecoming Sunday.



CHRISTMAS BAZAAR and CRAFT FAIR

We are a long way off from December’s fundraiser, but if you have some extra downtime during these summer months, would you consider working on your special craft talents so that they may be shared with the church at the Bazaar. People love handmade crafts. Thank you for whatever you can do for our church.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Don’t forget to check in at our website and FaceBook page. The links are directly below. They are updated several times each week and often share information from the larger church that we may not know of otherwise. If you have a knack for working through social media and you would like to help us expand our presence, please let us know.

GIFT CARDS

Big Y and *Stop and Shop* gift card sales are a continuing fundraiser of our congregation. Please contact Linda M. if you would like to purchase any. The church earns 5% on all sales. Thank you.

CONTACT INFO: HATFIELD CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

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Committee Chairpersons:

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| <i>Benevolence, Amy N.</i> | <i>Music Committee, Sue M.</i> |
| <i>Christian Education, Anita W.</i> | <i>Real Folks Society, Martha Z.</i> |
| <i>Church Moderator, Jonathan B.</i> | <i>Trustees, Ed M.</i> |
| <i>Deacons, Jeff F.</i> | |

