

# The Bell Tower

Newsletter of the First Congregational Church of Hatfield, UCC

2020

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## One Strange Holiday Season

This is going to be one strange holiday season. The time between Thanksgiving and Christmas is marked traditionally as a time of festivity. People gather and celebrate, travelling long distances to be together or just walking across the street to be with neighbours. People who work together share in Christmas parties and children queue up in long lines to meet Santa. Stores and restaurants are full.

Now these holiday season traditions are wrought with anxiety as COVID-19 numbers explode and promise to grow worse due to these very practices. Hospitals are already being overwhelmed. *Doctors Without Borders* is working in our country calling it a humanitarian disaster! States may need to order closures again or families may decide on their own to stay at home. Therefore, this is going to be one strange holiday season.

I wonder if I could try and tease out a bit of a silver lining to this strange holiday season. Church people have long moaned about the commercialization of Christmas. People who won't even consider attending a Christmas church Service insist that we must still keep "Christ in Christmas." Maybe this strange holiday season will force us to realize, as it says in *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, "How could it be so? It came without ribbons. It came without tags. It came without packages, boxes or bags. And [the Grinch] puzzled and puzzled 'till his puzzler was sore. Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before. What if Christmas, he thought, doesn't come from a store. What if Christmas, perhaps, means a little bit more."

Maybe the silver lining of this strange holiday season is our opportunity to realize that Christmas "means a little bit more." Maybe we can move beyond the world's holiday season and see it again as a holy season. Maybe we can give Advent's anticipation a chance to sink in and truly prepare us for the wondrous mystery that is Christmas, the human birth of Jesus, the incarnate Son of God.

The holiday season's emphasis upon stuff is a severe distraction from the holy season's story of God's unimaginable entrance into the world in the birth of Jesus. The sacred strangeness of God's impoverished Incarnation has a chance to emerge

from behind the curtain of reindeer and snowmen, paradoxically, because of this strange holiday season where such things must be curtailed.

The dimming of the holiday lights give the season a chance to be seen, or as the prophet Isaiah reveals in his inspiring poetry: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness — on them light has shined." (Isaiah 9:2)



And it is a strange and unexpected light. For a thousand years, the People of God had imagined the Day of the Lord as coming with violence and a burning divine wrath. They saw it as unbridled power and conquest. Then, there was an ordinary child born out of wedlock to a displaced family in a conquered nation.

The child was named Jesus, which is drawn from the biblical name Joshua, the leader who fought his way into the Promised Land. Joshua/Jesus is a name that means *God saves* or *God helps*. Jesus remains true to His name, but redefines it radically from the warrior precedent of Joshua. Jesus' coming is the strange and unexpected message of peace, not a peace won by conquest, but a peace that intrinsically disavows violence, hatred and prejudice.

It is the peace of a child not a warrior, of one born in an animal's manger not a palace, of one announced to humble shepherds working in the night rather than to priests in the Temple.

It is a child who makes us whole and holy by forcing us to include the outcast. It is a mystery that counts us rich regardless of the wealth we may or may not have.



It is a revelation that the holy lives among us and is us. December 16<sup>th</sup> marks the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Beethoven's birth who once asked, "When will the time come in which there will be only human beings [not masters and slaves]?" The time came with Jesus' birth. Now it's time for us to catch-up and hopefully this strange holiday season will give us the chance.

## DECEMBER EVENTS

Mon. 7 <sup>th</sup>	At 5:30pm Rev. Randy will participate in the monthly meeting of HEART – Hatfield Equity Alliance fighting against Racism Together.
Wed. 9 <sup>th</sup>	Monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees at 7:00pm.
Thur. 10 <sup>th</sup>	Rev. Randy will participate in the monthly meeting of the Hampshire Association Committee on Ministry online meeting at 5:30pm.
Mon. 14 <sup>th</sup>	On-line <i>Exploring the Bible</i> study group from 7-8:00pm.
Tue. 15 <sup>th</sup>	Rev. Randy will participate in the monthly meeting of HEADS Up – Hatfield Embraces Acceptance and Dismantles Stigma at 5:30pm.
Sat. 19 <sup>th</sup>	Hatfield's annual Luminarium celebration around Town Hall. 6 to 6:30pm Luminarium program then from 6:30 to approximately 6:45pm a fireworks display.
Sun. 20 <sup>th</sup>	Christmas Fund offering will be accepted.
Tue. 22 <sup>nd</sup>	Monthly meeting of the Board of Deacons at 6:00pm.
Thur. 24 <sup>th</sup>	Christmas Eve Service of <i>Nine Lessons and Carols</i> at 7:00pm.
Mon. 28 <sup>th</sup>	On-line <i>Exploring the Bible</i> study group from 7-8:00pm.

## REGULAR GATHERINGS – Yoga and Choir are on-hold for in-person gatherings until further notice

Sundays: Worship Service begins at 10:00am. Sunday School at 9:30am.

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.

Thursdays: Choir rehearses in the sanctuary at 6:30pm.

## ON-LINE PRESENCE AND PLANS TO MOVE FORWARD

We are adhering to the protocols issued by Gov. Baker (<https://www.mass.gov/lists/safety-standards-for-places-of-worship>) and the Conference (<https://www.sneucc.org/phasingforward>) as we re-enter the church building for worship.

An internet connection has been established at the church. There are many advantages to having access to the web available at church, one of which is that we are now able to live-stream our worship Services so that those who choose may worship in person and those who choose to worship from home may also be a part of our gathered congregation. Even when the pandemic passes, whenever that may be, we will continue to live-stream broadcast our Services for those who are unable to join us in person.

Due to the pandemic, however, the church Service will be conducted differently. There will be no congregational singing and no physical sharing of the gift of peace. We will enter the church and keep our social distancing of six feet. Families may sit together, but separate households will need to remain at a distance from one another in the pews. There will be no Sunday School other than our online meetings and there will be no Chat and Coffee. As things improve gradually, we will return to our much-loved traditions.

The monthly cost for the internet and Zoom services is \$100/month. Several people have already offered to cover half of a monthly cost. If you would like to donate \$50 for this purpose, please send your donation to Marty and note on the check that it is for internet charges. And thank you.

It is hard to imagine the benefits emerging from this pandemic, but its push to move the idea of church beyond a building and further out to the larger community may be one such benefit. The pandemic has ushered us into a new configuration of the church and community. It is no longer limited to the ones who can or wish to join us physically. Our community is now as open as the world-wide-web. People can join us in real time as part of our worshiping church no matter where they are. This is a blessing.

I imagine that there may be bumps along the road as we move forward, but we will still move forward. It is kind of exciting to think about what the future holds. I am looking forward to just what church as the called People of God will come to look like.

## SEASON OF ADVENT

The church's calendar imitates the cycle of Jesus' life, beginning with the time of anticipation before His birth and ending with Him enthroned in heaven. On November 29<sup>th</sup> the church's liturgical cycle began again with the First Sunday of Advent.

Advent's four Sundays represent the putative 4,000 years that the world awaited the coming of the Saviour. Advent is a season of anticipation and preparation for the coming of Jesus into the world, and it is also a time of increasing joy and celebration as we approach closer to the mystery of God's Incarnation in the holy child of Bethlehem. Advent will feel different this year for obvious reasons, but it still offers us the chance to spiritually prepare for the coming Christ Child.

If you are among those who worshiping in person, and if you would like to be a part of one of our Advent Services by lighting the candles of the Advent wreath, please contact Rev. Randy. The increasing light of the Advent wreath is a beautiful and meaningful representation of this holy season of anticipation and gathering light.

**EXPLORING THE BIBLE ON-LINE STUDY GROUP**

The Massachusetts Bible Society's past Executive Director, Rev. Anne Robertson, has authored a three-volume text called *Exploring the Bible*. We are reading Volume II on the Old Testament. If you would like to become more comfortable with the Bible, I encourage you to join us for Bible study. If you would like to join us, please send me an email ([randyc1897@gmail.com](mailto:randyc1897@gmail.com)) and I will send you the log-in information for our Zoom meeting.



**CHURCH APPAREL FUNDRAISER**



The congregation has lost most all of this year's fundraisers due to the pandemic. We hope you will consider supporting our church through our upcoming apparel fundraiser. We will be selling clothing and masks that will carry our "Good Intentions" logo. The site ([https://stores.inksoft.com/hatfield\\_church](https://stores.inksoft.com/hatfield_church)) is up and running and in time for Christmas gift-giving. Thanks Anthony for all your work!

**CHRISTMAS FUND OFFERING**

Every year as the United Church of Christ approaches the holy night of Jesus' birth, the night when the Bethlehem shepherds were blessed with the first news of the Saviour's birth, a call goes out to congregations and members asking for donations to the Christmas Fund. This offering supports those who have helped to shepherd the church.

If you would like to contribute to the Christmas Fund Offering, you may do so with a check clearly marked for this purpose and sent to Marty Z. or directly to the church at 41 Main Street. Donations may also be made electronically by clicking on this link: <https://www.pbucc.org/index.php/art-ma-landing/opportunities-for-giving>

Thank you for your generosity.



Rev. Cathy Barker

"My father, a UCC minister, died of cancer at age 54, just after Thanksgiving. I was fourteen; my brother and sister were grown and had to go back to their homes. Mom and I were lonely, confused about the future, and our financial picture was very shaky. Further, we faced a bleak Christmas . . . we didn't even want to think about that.

"Then came a check from the Christmas Fund. We were both deeply touched that our national Church somehow knew that we were in need and gave us this gift. It didn't solve all our troubles, but it made it possible for us to have Christmas. We felt the love behind the gift, and that was transformative.

"Throughout my mother's long life, she gave faithfully and gratefully to the Christmas Fund, and I have done the same through the churches I have served as pastor. I've often told our story, because I want people to know how important it is to reach out in this way.

"When the pandemic caused such upheaval, and an appeal came from the Pension Boards telling about the increased need for emergency funds, I sat right down and wrote a check. My husband and I are glad we could help."

In 2019, gifts to the Christmas Fund enabled:
• Monthly pension supplementation for 350 retired clergy and lay employees (\$1,347,419)
• Health premium supplementation for 144 retired clergy and lay employees (\$374,577)
• Emergency grants for 69 individuals and families (\$123,727)
• Christmas "Thank You" gift checks to 521 retired clergy and lay employees (\$260,500)

**THE CHRISTMAS FUND**  
For the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund

## GIFTS FOR CHILDREN COLLECTION

Due to the overwhelming response to Danielle's outreach through FaceBook for this year's collection for Gifts for Children, our first batch of families has already been spoken for. People were enthusiastic and joyous givers. So far Danielle has, due to her outreach, provided 40 children with gifts! What a gift this is in itself. We do have additional families that we can help. However, it is too difficult with COVID-19 to have people out shopping, to have a place to collect the gifts, and to have the gifts picked up or delivered. All of that would lead to a lot of people with a lot of handling of the gifts. Therefore, if anyone is interested in helping, please consider the purchase of a *Target* or *Walmart* \$25 gift card. This helps the organization fill in for any children that still have needs. A few people could chip-in for a card if \$25 is too expensive. Please send gift cards to Carol. The gift cards must be received by December 6th. Carol will then forward the cards to DCF. Thank you in advance for your support. Carol and Danielle.

## CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION – NINE LESSONS AND CAROLS

We are told by the Evangelist Luke that Bethlehem shepherds were "keeping watch over their flocks by night" (2:8) when the angel chorus announced Jesus' birth to them. In faithfulness to this tradition, churches and congregations around the globe gather in the darkness of one of the longest nights of the year to announce the birth of the Christ Child, the one who brings light into our world.

The continuing pandemic may limit the size and scope of your holiday festivities, but it can do nothing to darken the church's Christmas message that God has entered our world as one of us in Jesus. We hope that you will choose to make our 7PM Christmas Eve worship Service a part of your Christmas celebration this year. You can attend in person or online. And I'm sure that if you would like to share your voice with our choir, this can be arranged too.

## GIFT CARDS

*Big Y* and *Stop and Shop* gift card sales are a continuing fundraiser of our congregation. Please contact Linda M. about purchasing the cards. The church earns 5% on all sales. Thank you.

## FOOD BANK VOLUNTEERS

Unfortunately, volunteering opportunities at the Food Bank have been put on hold until further notice due to the pandemic.

### CONTACT INFO: HATFIELD CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

Website: [www.hatfieldchurch.org](http://www.hatfieldchurch.org)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/First-Congregational-Church-of-Hatfield-UCC](https://www.facebook.com/First-Congregational-Church-of-Hatfield-UCC)

Pastor: Rev. Randy Calvo 413-824-1630 [randyc1897@gmail.com](mailto:randyc1897@gmail.com)

### Committee Chairpersons:

*Benevolence, Amy N.*

*Christian Education, Anita W.*

*Church Moderator, Amy N.*

*Deacons, Jeff F.*

*Music Minister, Anthony T.*

*Real Folks Society, Martha Z.*

*Trustees, Jonathan B.*

### HATFIELD'S 350<sup>TH</sup> General Community Events

**December 19<sup>th</sup>** – Luminarium/Fireworks (Partnership w/ Firefighters Association)

Rescheduled until Sunday, **May 30, 2021** – 350th Anniversary Parade beginning at 1PM.

#### Historical Events & Tours

**May 30, 2021** – Incorporation Day and the Crossing of the CT River. Incorporation Day Celebration will go forward as a modified event.

For the latest information, visit [www.hatfield350.com](http://www.hatfield350.com) or follow us on Facebook @Hatfield350th.

