

The Bell Tower

Newsletter of the First Congregational Church of Hatfield, UCC

2021

February

No. 2

“Good Intentions”

You may remember that we ran a fundraiser prior to Christmas in offered church Along with the local congrega- Church of



which we apparel for sale. name of our tion, the United Christ's comma (from the statement “Never place a period where God has placed a comma.”) and the rainbow symbolizing that we are an Open and Affirming church, was the motto of “Good Intentions.”

“Good Intentions” is a healthy affirmation of what church should be. It is humble enough to realize and to proclaim that we are not perfect; and simultaneously, it is daring enough to realize and to proclaim that we are always striving to be better.

A good example of this also connects with February being Black History Month. Many a slave-trader sold other human beings as commodities for a profit, never willing to think of their product in any other terms than profit and loss, and yet they most likely sat with their own families in prominent pews in their churches without a tinge of a guilty conscience, no remorse, no empathy.

One such slave-trader was John Newton. He was born in England to a Puritan mother. During a terrible storm at sea, he prayed to God for help. He credited God for miraculously protecting him, and at that point embraced his Christian faith.

Even so, Newton continued in human trafficking for another six or seven years. When he retired, he began to study Christian theology, and within a decade he was Ordained an Anglican priest.

It was not his conversion that awakened Newton to the immorality of the slave trade. Sitting in church did not cause him to reevaluate his past profession. It was the study of Christianity that turned Newton into an abolitionist. It was when he was confronted with the Word of God that Newton realized finally the sinfulness of treating other human beings as objects to be bought and sold for a profit.

With this moral awakening, Newton penned the words for the hymn *Amazing Grace*, the hymn that begins with the pride-shattering words, “Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.” This is not the formality of Christian

humility. These words well-up from Newton’s repulsion with his earlier life as a slave-trader. Newton realized it was only Jesus’ freely offered amazing grace that could save such a wretched person as he.

Newton went on to publish a hugely successful abolitionist pamphlet that is credited with helping to end slavery in England. In it, he revealed to a willfully unknowing public the savagery not of the African slaves, but of the “civilized” slave-traders.

The Christian church that showed little qualm with slavery is the same Christian church that fortified the slaves here in America and continues to vivify the Black community. In Georgia, the pastor of Martin Luther King’s Ebenezer Baptist Church was elected to

last month. Represent- interviewed about the



the Senate A Georgia tative was and spoke political miscalculation of the Senator’s opponent because, as he said, you never attack the Black church.

The church can be shamefully silent when God’s Word should ring clearly, and the same church can be the only voice of God when none other is brave enough to stand up for what is right and righteous.

We do not protect the church by ignoring the sexual abuse of children or by hiding other improprieties. Look at all the “nones” in our society and listen to their rejection of church because of these futile attempts to create the fairytale that the church is perfect. I know the theology behind these efforts, but I am too much the pragmatic to believe them.

But the church can embrace Good Intentions. We may make mistakes. We may backslide. But if Good Intentions remain to correct and to motivate, we will be able to serve as the People of God. Why? Not because we’re perfect, but because of Jesus’ amazing grace.

This requires that the members of the church strive continually to open themselves to grace and to experience God’s Word more sincerely just as did John Newton so that Good Intentions may emerge and take hold. And what a time to do just that as February is also the beginning of our Lenten journey to the unbelievable mystery of our crucified God.

FEBRUARY EVENTS

Sun. 7 th	On-line Ecclesiastical Council for Julia Kahn at 3:00pm. Interested in attending?
Mon. 8 th	At 5:30pm Rev. Randy will participate in the online monthly meeting of HEART – Hatfield Equity Alliance fighting against Racism Together. Monthly online meeting of the Board of Trustees at 7:00pm.
Tue. 9 th	Rev. Randy will participate in the monthly online meeting of HEADS Up – Hatfield Embraces Acceptance and Dismantles Stigma – at 6:30pm.
Thus. 11 th	Rev. Randy will participate in the monthly meeting of the Hampshire Association Committee on Ministry online meeting at 5:30pm.
Mon. 15 th	On-line Exploring the Bible study group from 7-8:00pm.
Wed. 17 th	ASH WEDNESDAY. Combined online worship Service at 7:00pm hosted by Whately.
Tue. 23 rd	Monthly online meeting of the Board of Deacons at 6:00pm.
Wed. 24 th	First gathering for the online Lenten Discussion Series at 7:00pm.

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.

SHARED PASTORATE

The Annual Congregational Meeting was held on January 17th. At that time, a motion was made to call for a vote of the members on allowing Rev. Randy to serve as the pastor of the Hatfield and Sunderland Congregational Churches, United Church of Christ. Votes were accepted until January 29th, the results of which were too late to make it into this month's newsletter. Information on this topic will be shared with all our members once a decision has been made and the details worked out.

PRAYER SHAWL MINISTRY

The Conference has begun a prayer shawl ministry. They have asked local congregations to make the shawls, pray over them and then send them to the Conference to be shared with people who do good for the church, communities and others. One of our members has offered to help with this ministry and to get novices going on making the shawls. If you are interested, please contact Rev. Randy.



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 have re-entered the church building for worship. If the pandemic worsens, however, church leadership will reevaluate the situation. There is a possibility that we will have to refrain from in-person worship until the numbers indicate that it is safe to return to the church building for corporate worship. If there is such a change, an email will be sent to all members and it will be posted on our website and FaceBook page.

Due to the pandemic, the church Service will be conducted differently while we gather in-person. 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.

BROADCAST VOLUNTEERS ABSOLUTELY NEEDED

Mark Gelotte has run the broadcast from the church building every Sunday since we returned to in-person worship in October. We cannot expect one person to perform this task every week. We have to have other volunteers. Mark is ready to train others to help so that we will be able to continue to live-stream-broadcast the church Service during the pandemic and even afterwards. So far only two people have come forward to help. Please contact Rev. Randy if you can help with this church ministry. Your help is needed!

ECCLESIASTICAL COUNCIL

Julia Kahn is seeking Ordination. Part of the process is her Ecclesiastical Council at which there should be representation from all congregations in the Hampshire Association. This will take place online on Sunday, February 7th at 3PM. Rev. Randy will be attending. If you would like to attend, please let Rev. Randy know. The Zoom log-in and Julia's Ordination Paper will be shared with you.

SEASON OF LENT

The season of Lent begins with Ash Wednesday and Ash Wednesday falls on the 17th of this month. Lent's 40 days are based on Jesus' 40 days in the Jordan and before the start of His public and meditation clarified His calling and do. Likewise, our season of Lent gives us to fulfill our calling as believers and as the



desert after His baptism by John in the ministry. Jesus' 40 days of fasting, prayer prepared Him for the work He needed to the opportunity to better prepare ourselves corporate People of God.

These 40 days are a penitential season. This means they are a time of introspection. We are challenged to look at our lives by focusing on the final days of Jesus' life. His complete devotion to us inspires us to judge our devotion to Jesus. He was willing to suffer and die for us. How have we responded to such a loving devotion in our faith and in how we lead our lives?

Lent is a sacred opportunity to not dwell on our faults, but to move past them and to become better Christians. Lent is a time of growth. How appropriate that its 40 days are the ones that coincide with the transition from winter to spring. I hope and pray that we will all take advantage of Lent to grow closer to Christ and His church, and to explore more deeply our spiritual selves.

One way in which the church is here to help with this growth is through our Lenten Discussion Series. The flier with all the dates, topics and presenters is found below. The series begins with a live-streamed worship Service on Ash Wednesday. The general theme of the series is "Even the cherry blossom falls ..." The theme will be explained and explored in our first session, and then each presenter will take it in some unique direction.

Due to the on-going pandemic, all these gatherings will be held online. I will miss being with people in person, but thank God for what Zoom makes possible. A new log-in will be required each week and it will be emailed to all who receive this newsletter. You are invited to share this log-in with others in the hopes that they too will discover the power of Lent's transformation.

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) and I will send you the log-in information for our Zoom meeting. As mentioned above, Lent is the perfect time to deepen our relationship with Christ. Reading, studying and discussing His Word can only help.



GIFT CARDS

Big Y and *Stop and Shop* gift card sales are a continuing fundraiser of our congregation. Due to the fact that fewer of us are attending church in person during the pandemic, our sales of these gift cards have declined. Linda makes it as easy as possible to pick-up the cards at her home. Give her a call to arrange a day and time; Linda places them in her mailbox; you leave your payment there; and it's all done. Please contact Linda M. if you can help with this church fundraiser. 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 Facebook: www.facebook.com/First-Congregational-Church-of-Hatfield-UCC

Pastor: Rev. Randy Calvo 413-824-1630 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.



2021 - 24th Annual Lenten Discussion Series - 2021



Even the Cherry Blossom Falls ...

February 17th - Ash Wednesday

All are invited to join the Whately Congregational Church for a worship service at 7PM. Linda Rhinehart Neas homily.

February 24th

First session offered by Rev. James Koyama at 7PM. Pastor of the Montague Congregational Church, UCC. Session Title: Snow on the Deerfield River: Reflecting on Idols

March 3rd

Second session offered by Rev. Sherril Willis at 7PM. Member of the Sunderland Congregational Church, UCC. Session Title: Thank God, the Blossoms Fall!

March 10th

Third session offered by Rev. Randy Calvo at 7PM. Pastor of the Hatfield Congregational Church, UCC. Session Title: Be brave Pandora and open the jar again.

March 17th

Fourth session offered by Rev. Dr. Cynthia Crosson-Harrington at 7PM. Pastor of the Whately Congregational Church, UCC. Session Title: Beauty in the Broken Places

March 24th

Fifth session offered by Rev. Dr. Robert Gormbley at 7PM. Interim Pastor of the Shelburne Congregational Church, UCC. Session Title: Failure Isn't Fatal

Due to the continuing pandemic, all sessions will be offered live-streamed. Please send an email to your pastor or church office for **EACH** week's unique Zoom log-in link.