

# The Bell Tower

Newsletter of the First Congregational Church of Hatfield, UCC

2021

January

No. 1

## The Lesson of The Epiphany

I read recently an article in the *Boston Globe* by Josh Bernoff about how the social media behemoths are increasing the divisions in our country by creating algorithms that supply their users with information that they already support. (<https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/12/18/opinion/social-media-broke-america-heres-how-fix-it/>)

Pew Research released statistics this summer that nearly 1 in 5 American adults get their news primarily through social media, with an obvious skew toward younger adults. Bernoff argues that a practical solution may be to revive the FCC's Fairness Doctrine, which was suspended in 1987.

This regulation required broadcasters who aired editorial content to provide airtime for opposing viewpoints. This was such a common practice that the television news magazine *60 Minutes'* segment "Point Counter-Point" was parodied in a running sketch on *Saturday Night Live*.

If the Fairness Doctrine could be applied to the social media corporations, Bernoff writes that users would be exposed to alternative opinions. He quotes Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis' opinion that the remedy for falsehoods and fantasies is "more speech, not enforced silence."

As we enter into the New Year, I think this idea of talking more to each other rather than at each other should have the blessing of people of faith. We will celebrate The Epiphany this month. The story of the Magi is found only in Matthew's Gospel. Matthew is written for a Jewish-Christian community. These are people who believe in Jesus, but who are also maintaining their Jewish traditions, as well.

Only the Matthean Jesus says, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one iota, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished." (5:17-18) It is within this tradition that Matthew tells of The Epiphany.

Luke's Christmas shares with us the events of Jesus' birth. Matthew chooses to say only "after Jesus was born." (2:1) This is when the Evangelist introduces the magi from the East. It is said that they have tracked a new star in the night sky and that the

star has led them not to Bethlehem, but to Jerusalem! Here upon King seeking guidance. turns to



they call Herod further Herod the

priests and scribes who seek revelation in Scripture, and there they read the passage from the prophet Micah that the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem.

When the magi finally reach their unknown destination of Bethlehem, there is no mention or recollection of a wondrous birth in a stable announced by angels. Rather, we hear the more mundane news that the child abides in a house. (2:11) This domestic tone, however, only draws out the contrast with the international visitors from the East.

Matthew's intention in recording the account of The Epiphany is to share with his community the fulfillment of Isaiah's Old Testament prophecy that other nations shall come to Israel to join in the Messiah's reign: "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. ... Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn." (60: 1,3)

Matthew's Gospel reflects the broad outreach of the earliest Jesus movement. Even those clinging to their beloved Jewish traditions, recognize that Jesus' birth and ministry have shared their faith with all nations, all peoples. Others have come to the light of Jesus, and those already there celebrated this diversity, thus Matthew's Gospel.

Ever since there has been a Christian faith, we have celebrated and cultivated diversity. The Gospel that began with The Epiphany ends with the resurrected Jesus insisting, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations ..." (28:19) Our faith has grown and flowered because of the openness we preached and practiced.

We need to share this blessed realization in our communities beyond church so that our light may draw others to our faith's example of openness and acceptance. Let us enthusiastically practice this aspect of our faith so that others may be drawn to its example because the alternative of separation and division is too fearful to imagine.

## JANUARY EVENTS

Fri. 1 <sup>st</sup>	New Year's Day 2021.
Wed. 6 <sup>th</sup>	Epiphany – the twelfth day after Christmas, the Magi arrive in Bethlehem.
Sun. 10 <sup>th</sup>	Celebration of Ministry with Liturgy of Release for Rev. Jill Graham and Rev. Kelly Gallagher, local Associate Conference Ministers, at 3:00pm.
Mon. 11 <sup>th</sup>	At 5:30pm Rev. Randy will participate in the monthly meeting of HEART – Hatfield Equity Alliance fighting against Racism Together. On-line <i>Exploring the Bible</i> study group from 7-8:00pm.
Tue. 12 <sup>th</sup>	Rev. Randy will participate in the monthly meeting of HEADS Up – Hatfield Embraces Acceptance and Dismantles Stigma – at 5:30pm.
Wed. 13 <sup>th</sup>	Monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees at 7:00pm.
Thur. 14 <sup>th</sup>	Rev. Randy will participate in the monthly meeting of the Hampshire Association Committee on Ministry online meeting at 5:30pm.
Sun. 17 <sup>th</sup>	Annual Congregational Meeting at 11:00am.
Mon. 18 <sup>th</sup>	Martin Luther King Jr. Day. First day of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, concluding on the 25 <sup>th</sup> .
Mon. 25 <sup>th</sup>	On-line <i>Exploring the Bible</i> study group from 7-8:00pm.
Tue. 26 <sup>th</sup>	Monthly meeting of the Board of Deacons at 6:00pm.

## 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. If the pandemic worsens over the winter, 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.

## SEASON OF CHRISTMAS/EPIPHANY

For many Christmas ends on December 25<sup>th</sup>, but in the church Christmas is just beginning on the day we celebrate Jesus' birth. Plus, so many people rushed to put up Christmas trees and Christmas lights this year as an elixir to fight the pandemic-blahs, why would we want to rush to take them down so quickly? We will continue to share in the mystery and joy of Christmas long after the world has moved on to After Christmas Sales.

First we will tell the story of the Bethlehem shepherds and the angelic chorus as told to us in Luke's Gospel. Then on the twelfth day after Christmas, we will celebrate Epiphany. On this day we share in Matthew's story of the Magi arriving in Bethlehem to honour the Holy Child with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

This Christmas/Epiphany Season carries us all the way to Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent. So during a winter that the experts warn will be dangerous because of the increasing numbers of COVID infections let us continue to celebrate the hope that Jesus' birth brings to all the world.

## REVS. JILL GRAHAM AND KELLY GALLAGHER

An administrative transition Associate Conference New England Conference. If provided by the Conference: [called-14417678](tel:14417678)



The Rev. Terry Region beginning on February 1<sup>st</sup>.

will take place on February 1, 2021. On that day, six new Missioners will assume their positions within the Southern you would like to read about them, please read the article <https://www.sneucc.org/newsdetail/six-area-conference-missioners-for-2021-> Yasuko Ogawa will serve our newly designated Northwest

What the articles do not state specifically is that the Rev. Jill Graham, who has served for 13 years and the Rev. Kelly Gallagher, who has served for 7 years, will not be continuing as the Associate Conference Ministers for the Associations in the Western Region. They have both been a blessing to us, so we, in turn, hope to find ways, together, to express our support, gratitude, and love for Jill and Kelly. Therefore, a Celebration of Ministry with Liturgy of Release via Zoom is scheduled for January 10, 2021 at 3:00pm. I will be attending and if you would like to as well, please click on this link: <https://www.sneucc.org/eventdetail/celebrating-the-ministries-of-the-rev-jill-graham-and-the-rev-kelly-gallagher-14902597>.

## 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.



## ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

The 2021 Annual Congregational Meeting will be held on Sunday, January 17<sup>th</sup>, at 11:00am. The meeting will be conducted via Zoom because of the COVID restrictions on in-person gatherings. If we are allowed to still gather in church, those without computer access are invited to participate in the meeting from the church building, while still maintaining all of the necessary safety protocols.

If you feel called to serve on any of our church boards or committees, please make this known to one of the following on the Nominations Committee: Bill B., Jeff F., Carolyn F. or Jonathan B. You may also contact Rev. Randy and he will pass the information along to the Committee.

The polity of the Congregational Church/United Church of Christ is fundamentally democratic. The members of the congregation define church authority. This is a privilege and also a responsibility. We are empowered to act in this way through the grace God shares with us in our baptisms. Let us not take this gift for granted. The church is an oasis for many of us. It is a spiritual well that refreshes us from the staleness of what the world offers. And the church is a much-needed voice of compassion and understanding in a society defined increasingly by intolerance and even violence. Let us do all that we can to keep our church vibrant.

## 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.*

*Happy New Year*