

The Bell Tower

Newsletter of the First Congregational Church of Hatfield, UCC

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Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

The *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity* is an annual, ecumenical event calling upon all Christians and Christian denominations to respect each other as essential members of the one Body of Christ, the church universal. Uniformity is not required or expected to fulfill this prayer.

Paul makes this absolutely clear in his writing to the early church community in the city of Rome: “For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.” (Romans 12:4-5)

The imagery of the body conveys a diversity held together by an overarching unity. The different parts of the body perform different functions, but these differences combine for the good of the whole. The differences are necessary. Uniformity would be catastrophic to the body.

Accordingly, the prayer for Christian unity is not about making all religious institutions and aspirations identical. People are wondrously different, and people approach Christ in different ways and with different expectations. This is why there are differences among churches and among Christians. These differences allow people to worship, serve and learn as they so need.

The prayer for Christian unity is about enhancing the respect among Christians and churches. Differences do not need to devolve into divisions. Different does not need to equate with better or worse. This is what destroys unity.

Much has been in the news recently about addiction and the increasing numbers affected by it. Illicit drugs or drug abuse override the harmony of the body. Addiction demands that it be served no matter the consequence to any other need of the body. Addiction creates a false priority, and this will damage or destroy the body.

The notion of religious primacy, that “my religion” whatever “my religion” may be is the only acceptable religious expression, affects the Body of Christ like drug addiction debilitates the physical body. The *Week of Prayer for*

Christian Unity strives to help Christians see Christ in each other and in each other’s church – differences and all.

A recent article in the Ideas Section of the *Boston Globe* (<https://www.bostonglobe.com/2022/11/30/opinion/church-should-be-more-like-burning-man/>) centered on the annual Burning Man festival, and it was under the title “Church should be more like Burning Man.” According to the psychologist author, Burning Man thrives on generosity and community. Everyone is accepted and everyone is valued, and there is a huge spectrum of the sorts of people who attend. This openness has lasting effects on participants who reported that they felt more connected to others and to something greater than themselves even after they left.

People will go to great lengths to seek out ways to feel connected to one another and to a higher purpose. These are powerful motivators.



This year’s *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity* theme reflects this reality and is drawn from Isaiah 1:17: “[L]earn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.” Isaiah wrote these

words as a corrective. Worship was focused on Temple sacrifices. Virtue was credited to those wealthy enough to afford such offerings, and the poor who could not were deemed punished by God. Religion was limited to the cultic activities, and Isaiah lashes out with God’s anger that true worship cannot ignore the plight of others.

See the marred hand of Christ reaching down from heaven to grasp the hands of people who are reaching up. When Christians and churches work together, we build community, draw closer to Christ, and work for good in the world. Hopefully those not involved with church will be drawn in by this and welcomed by the church.

JANUARY EVENTS

Sun. 1 st	New Year's Day.
Mon. 2 nd	Rev. Randy will attend the monthly meeting of HEART (Hatfield Equity Alliance fighting against Racism Together) at 5:30pm. Online <i>Exploring the Bible</i> study group from 7-8:00pm.
Tue. 3 rd	Rev. Randy will attend the monthly Association Committee on Ministry meeting at 5:45pm.
Wed. 4 th	Online meeting of the Church Council at 7:00pm.
Fri. 6 th	Epiphany.
Sun. 8 th	Real Folks Annual Meeting at 10:45am in the church parlor.
Mon. 9 th	Monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees at 7:00pm.
Sun. 15 th	Annual Congregational Meeting at noon, following the worship Service at the special time of 11:00am.
Wed. 18 th	Rev. Randy will attend the monthly meeting of HEADS Up at 6:30pm. The <i>Week of Prayer for Christian Unity</i> begins today and lasts through the 25 th .
Mon. 16 th	Online <i>Exploring the Bible</i> study group from 7-8:00pm.
Tue. 24 th	Monthly online meeting of the Board of Deacons at 6:00pm.
Mon. 30 th	Online <i>Exploring the Bible</i> study group 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.

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

Thursdays: Choir rehearses in the parlor at 7:00pm.

CHURCH COVID POLICIES

The Church Council has decided that while the numbers remain higher than we would like, the COVID vaccines and COVID treatments have combined to lower the risks of this pandemic virus. However, there are increased risks of RSV infections and the flu. Accordingly, the Council encourages those attending in person to wear a facemask for the benefit of those who may be immunocompromised, but face coverings are now optional. The Council will continue to monitor the COVID numbers. If the numbers spike upwards, then we may return to the mask requirement if needed.



STUFF OUR STOCKINGS SOCK COLLECTION

This collection of new socks was conducted throughout December and will come to an end in early January. The socks will be distributed to help the homeless stay warm during the coldest weeks of winter. Thank you for your Christian generosity to those most in need. Also, a thank you to Bombas Socks. This company donates one pair of socks to charity for each pair purchased. We received fifty pairs of socks from the company this year.

CHURCH MUSIC

Music is such an important part of our worship Services. Our Music Minister, Anthony, and the choir are a blessing to the entire congregation. The choir rehearses on Thursday evenings. We would love to have you come and join the choir, or maybe reach out to Anthony if you have any questions. It is said that Augustine once mentioned, "To sing is to pray twice." I hope you will think about adding your voice to our choir.

NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE and ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

The Nominations Committee has been hard at work seeking volunteers to serve as officers of the church and on our church committees. The Annual Congregational Meeting is scheduled for Sunday, January 15th. Our worship Service on this Sunday will begin at the special hour of 11:00am, and the Annual Congregational Meeting will follow right after it.

If you would like to help with the work of our church, please let the Nominations Committee know. If you are approached by one of its members, please give it due consideration. We are fundamentally democratic in our governance and operation. We cannot function without the participation of our members. The members of the Nominations Committee are Bill Belden, Jeff Folts, Carolyn Forsyth and Edwin McGlew.



NEW YEAR'S DAY

There is an old Scottish tradition called "First-Footer." It speaks to being the first to enter a home on New Year's Day. It is a tradition that shares the hopes of good luck for the New Year and celebrates the bonds uniting family, friends and neighbours. The church is the House of God. This year New Year's Day falls on a Sunday. This gives us the chance to make our first visit of the New Year to God's House. This can only bode well for the New Year, a New Year begun with Christ and the worshipping community. To all of you, and through you to your family and friends, may 2023 bring many blessings.



FYI

I make visitations to those who are unable to join us at church for worship. I schedule these visits for the first week of each month. If you would like me to add you to this list in the New Year, please let Rev. Randy know. Also, if you or someone you know is hospitalized and in need of a pastoral visit, please do not hesitate to contact the pastor. And lastly, if you would like to be a reader in church and you have not yet been asked, please make mention of this to Rev. Randy or Maureen B.

EPIPHANY

There are two separate stories surrounding Jesus' birth. The one shared on Christmas is from the Gospel of Luke. It is the one of the Bethlehem manger, the shepherds and the angel chorus. This is the story behind the angel that stands atop many a Christmas tree.



The other story is from Matthew's Gospel. This one involves the Magi and the Bethlehem Star. Jesus is found in a house not a manger, and the text gives indications that Jesus may be nearly two years old at the time. This significant delay is conveyed to us in the celebration of Epiphany on the twelfth day of Christmas, January 6th. Matthew's account is the reason why some Christmas trees are topped by a star.

In the story of Epiphany, the Magi bring gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Gold comes to represent Jesus as the Son of David – the King of the Jews. Frankincense reveals Jesus as the incarnate Son of God. And myrrh is the burial spice that foretells Jesus' death as the Son of Man.

Usually these two stories get coopted into one, which is fair to neither. They both share a special and inspiring message. We should try to keep the two in mind at this special time of the year. Often we rush into Christmas, and sometimes so far in advance that we then rush to move past Christmas as soon as we hit December 25th. Epiphany calls on us to dwell upon the mystery of Jesus' birth, to keep its light in our lives even when stores begin their "After Christmas Sales" on December 26th.

BIBLE STUDY GROUP

Our online Bible study group is reading from the Gospels of Luke and John and the Acts of the Apostles at present. If you would like to join us as we read of Jesus' life and ministry, and then of the early days of the church, 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.

REAL FOLKS

The annual meeting will take place in person after the worship Service on January 8th. There will be an election of officers, disbursement of funds, and 2022 reports. If you are a member or wish to become one, please plan on attending.

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

Committee Chairpersons:

<i>Benevolence, Amy N.</i>	<i>Music Minister, Anthony T.</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>	

