

The Bell Tower

Newsletter of the First Congregational Church of Hatfield, UCC

2024

January

No. 1

A Shared New Year's Resolution

The new year is upon us. Many will begin by looking at their own lives and deciding how to improve them through New Year's resolutions. This is a long and worthy tradition. What if we considered broadening the scope of this annual rite of the New Year? What if we thought about our own resolutions in the wider perspective of hoping to improve the lives of those around us?

Our examples can influence other people. For example, I was reading the article "Scientists to Watch" (*Science News*, December 2, 2023) and was impressed by how many of these young professionals counted setting an example for other people as one of their goals.

Lauren Schroeder was one such young scientist. She is a person of colour and she grew up in South Africa. Growing up she saw that most in her field were white, foreign researchers. She noted how lonely it was to be native, female and non-white as she worked toward her Ph.D. and even into her professional career. She hopes that maybe her struggles and also her public success will inspire others who are under-represented to pursue their dreams. Her advancement may make possible the same for others.

Marjorie Weber was a student growing up in Grosse Pointe, MI where she did not see examples of women scientists, which made her think that a career in science was not an option. Then she took a science course in college taught by Greta Binford, a female scientist, and everything changed. Weber is quoted as saying, "Knowing that was a job and watching her do it was just incredibly life-shaping for me."

Weber now leads her own lab at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor and I, definitely not a scientist, am interested in her work because she is studying cooperation as an evolution driver. Usually, Darwin's natural selection emphasizes competition ("survival of the fittest") as an evolution driver, but Weber is documenting how cooperation appears repeatedly in this role.

From a Christian perspective, this is real world testimony that it does not have to be us vs. them

all the time to succeed. We are able to benefit ourselves, advance ourselves, advantage ourselves by cooperating with others rather than thinking we can do this only by competing against others.

This is practical evidence of what we preach as Christians, and it is much needed right now. Since the decade of the 2010's, so even prior to COVID-19, people have been under pressure economically. In an NPR interview with Nathan Dietz, who is at the University of Maryland's Do Good Institute, he reported, "People are under pressure. They're seeking to survive for themselves. So the focus isn't on uplifting others. It's on day-to-day living."

Dietz then offered that people need a reason to give and to volunteer. If they see their contribution as meaningful and important, that it helps meet the needs of people in the community, then they see beyond their own struggles. They see the benefits of cooperation. The interview concluded with the host stating, "You get something [for yourself] out of giving." (<https://www.npr.org/2023/12/13/1218999240/volunteering-in-the-u-s-is-on-the-decline-reports-say>) And this is what Marjorie Weber understands so well through studying the benefits of cooperation as an evolutionary trait. The ethics of cooperation need not be placed in the language of sacrifice. It can be understood as beneficial for others and for ourselves as revealed through faith and through science.

So as we enter a new year, let's think about the possibility of resolving not only to better our own lives, but those of others around us. May we set an example for them like Lauren Schroeder. May we see in cooperation, in volunteering and donating, blessings for others and also for us as Marjorie Weber is studying.

In a world that needs desperately our examples of faithful living, may we resolve in the New Year to set an example for those who do not know or who have forgotten the blessings that are our Christian faith and that are our Christian community of the church.

JANUARY EVENTS

Tue. 2 nd	Rev. Randy will attend the monthly meeting of the Association Committee on Ministry at 5:45pm.
Sat. 6 th	Epiphany. Twelfth day after Christmas.
Mon 8 th	Online <i>Exploring the Bible</i> study group from 7 – 8:00pm.
Tue. 9 th	Rev. Randy will attend the Hampshire Clergy Gathering from 12 – 1:00pm in Hadley.
Wed. 10 th	Monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees at 7:00pm.
Mon. 15 th	Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. Day.
Thur. 18 th	Week of Prayer for Christian Unity begins
Sun. 21 st	Worship Service at 11:00am ; Annual Congregational Meeting at 12:00pm.
Mon. 22 nd	Online <i>Exploring the Bible</i> study group from 7 – 8:00pm.
Tue. 23 rd	Monthly meeting of the Board of Deacons at 6:00pm.
Wed. 31 st	Rev. Randy will attend the Committee on Ministry chairs meeting in Tolland, CT.

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.

Sundays: The Joyful Ringers Bell Choir rehearses from 1-2:00pm.

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.

NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE / ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

In preparation for the Annual Meeting, the Nominations Committee is asking people to serve the church on Boards and Committees. We are a thoroughly democratic church. This only works when the congregation’s members invest themselves in the work of the church. You are needed.

The Annual Congregational Meeting will be held on January 21st. Our worship Service will be at the special time of 11:00am and the meeting will follow directly afterwards in person and via Zoom at noon. At this meeting we will elect our officers and board and committee members, vote on the 2024 budget, receive reports concerning the previous year and plan ahead for the new year. This is all part of the privilege and responsibility of our church democracy.

STUFF OUR STOCKINGS SOCK COLLECTION

New socks will be accepted until the 7th. Then, they will be donated in the cold of January to help the homeless in our area stay a bit warmer. It must be a horrible thing to live without shelter in the winter, but a warm, dry pair of socks makes it a bit more bearable. Thank you for your donations offered in the truest spirit of Christian generosity to those most in need.

ONLINE BIBLE STUDY GROUP

As we enter the New Year, maybe one of your resolutions was to become better acquainted with the writings in the Bible. If so, I invite you to join our online Bible study group. We meet on alternate weeks for one hour. We are reading from the Gospel of John. 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.

EPIPHANY

Epiphany marks the twelfth day after Christmas. Epiphany is the day on which the church celebrates the arrival of the Magi in Bethlehem to of the Jews.” The number of Matthew’s Gospel. It is there being three gifts. The Jesus’ royalty as the Son of Jesus’ divinity as Son of God, mortality as Son of Man. The revelation of Jesus’ birth in even those who are beyond the



there honour the newborn “king Magi is never mentioned in presumed to be three based on Magi bring gold to symbolize David, frankincense to symbolize and myrrh to symbolize Jesus’ Bethlehem star speaks to God’s ways beyond Scripture so that bounds of the expected People of

God may know of Jesus’ saving presence. All nations, all peoples are welcomed before the child because Jesus’ extraordinary ordinary birth means that He shares His humanity with all people everywhere. Jesus comes for

everyone. This is the “epiphany,” the manifestation, embodied in the Magi of the East coming to Bethlehem. May Epiphany remind us all that the people of God are all people.

WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

The World Council of Churches, of which the United Church of Christ is a member, has set the theme for this year’s Week of Prayer. It is, “You shall love the Lord your God ... and your neighbour as yourself.” (Luke 10:27) Jesus uses the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke’s Gospel to explain this concise statement of Christian ethics. It is utterly amazing that after summarizing the entirety of the commandments in the two Commandments of Love, the Gospel then goes on to offer the expansive story of the Good Samaritan. The emphasis falls squarely on love your neighbour. This does not deny the love of God aspect, but the placement of this parable reveals that the love of God is revealed in the real world love of our neighbour. In a world sorely torn apart by hatreds great and small, may this worldwide week of prayer for love be taken seriously by all Christians in the hopes that we may truly love one another.



IN THE NEW YEAR

As we begin a new year, Rev. Randy would like to remind everyone that he is only too happy to add you to the list of monthly visitations if you are not able to join us at church. If you or someone you know is hospitalized or ill and may need a pastoral visit, please let him know so that he can make arrangements to visit.

Every Sunday Rev. Randy offers the Children’s Sermon. If you have a story or activity you would like to share in this space, please let him know. I bet the children and youth would love someone new every now and then. Also, Randy arrives at church every Sunday at 8:50am if you would like to talk with him about anything.

If you would like to be one of the readers during our worship Services, please let Rev. Randy know.

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. Please like our pages and posts and share them as you choose.

GIFT CARDS

Big Y 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.

JOYFUL RINGERS BELL CHOIR

Anyone who is interested in joining The Joyful Ringers 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 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.

CONTACT INFO: HATFIELD CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

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Committee Chairpersons:

<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>	

