

The Bell Tower

Newsletter of the First Congregational Church of Hatfield, UCC

2022

July

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The Ideals of Independence Day

I have visited the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge a few times. I enjoy Rockwell's art. A copy of his "Saying Grace" hangs in our bedroom. I'm not sure who said it, but he made viewers "want to sigh and smile at the same time." Rockwell, I do not believe, was naïve or Pollyannaish. I think he was hope-filled, and I usually need a healthy dose of that.

Rockwell saw beauty in the ordinary, honored the extraordinary, and did not shrink from confronting our national failures, most poignantly for me in "The Problem We All Live With," which shows a brave Ruby Nell Bridges, a six-year-old Black girl who went to the William Franz Elementary School in Louisiana. For her safety, Ruby had to be escorted to school each day by four United States Marshals. The painting is reproduced below.

Those US Marshals are so much larger than Ruby that their heads aren't even in the painting, but Ruby is depicted as even larger, stronger. The splattered rotten tomatoes on the wall come from the direction of the viewer and in them Rockwell calls the viewer to task for our nation's prejudice, one of our failures to live up to the ideals of Independence Day.

On one of my two visits to the Rockwell Museum, I purchased a copy of "Freedom of Speech." It is reproduced also at the end of the newsletter. The Museum shares the story that by chance Rockwell attended a town meeting near his home in Arlington, Vermont. That night one man rose among his neighbors to voice an un-popular opinion.

There is an older man to the speaker's right who looks on with what I see as a fatherly pride. There is a man in the row in front of the speaker turning his head to listen intently. If you notice, though, the man over the speaker's right shoulder seems to be rolling his eyes, and another man to his right seems to have raised his eyebrows and pursed his lips with an expression that appears to say, "Oh boy."

At front and center is the speaker, steeled to say what he believes even if unpopular, with his eyes gazing upward almost as if Rockwell has him speaking not about a local item on the Town Meeting Warrant but as symbolizing freedom of speech itself. That he has the freedom to speak an unpopular opinion is noteworthy, but so is the fact that the others respect his freedom of speech whether they agree with him or not.

This picture stands on one of the bookshelves in my office. I bought this print of "Freedom of Speech" at the Museum because it encapsulates for me the ideals of democracy, the ideals we celebrate on Independence Day. I see this threatened in our nation presently. This is why I started off by saying I need a healthy dose of hope.

I remember when people said, "I disagree with what you say, but I'll defend to the death your right to say it." I do not hear that anymore. Now intimidation is on the rise. Respect has diminished, and threats of and actual violence have surged. Acrimony is now the convention. Freedom of speech has turned into churlish yelling matches not rational argument. Debate in government and compromise have been replaced with sound bites and intransience. Lies and ignorance are not disqualified; they're touted.

When Benjamin Franklin was asked after a session of the Constitutional Convention, "What kind of a government have you given us?" it is said that he replied, "A democracy, if you can keep it." Democracy demands an informed citizenry, rational argument and respect. Enforced silence, book bans, intimidation, ridicule of other perspectives and people, blatant lies and demagoguery all threaten our democracy.

Jesus respected each person. The Pentecost church rejoiced that the Spirit was shared with all. Our Congregational forebears impressed the merits of democracy on our emerging nation. The ideals of Independence Day are in our religious DNA. Let us pray, therefore, for our nation, and a renewed respect for democracy.

JULY EVENTS

Mon. 4 th	Independence Day. 246 th birthday of the United States of America
Sun. 10 th	Rev. Randy on vacation. Deacon-led worship Service at 9:30am
Mon. 11 th	Monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees at 7:00pm.
Tue. 12 th	Online <i>Exploring the Bible</i> study group from 7-8:00pm.
Tue. 26 th	Monthly online meeting of the Board of Deacons at 6:00pm. Online <i>Exploring the Bible</i> study group from 7-8:00pm.
Thur. 28 th	Rev. Randy will attend the in person Association Committee on Ministry meeting at noon.

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.

Wednesdays: Hatha Yoga classes take place every Wednesday at 6:00pm.

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

CHURCH COVID POLICIES

The Church Council has based its mask policy on the number of cases in Hampshire County. When the cases fall below 10 per day per 100,000 people, we will rescind the mask requirement for in person worship. At present, however, the numbers are high. Our mask policy is in place to try and keep us all as safe as possible. Please remember, as well, that all of our worship Services are live-streamed via Zoom. If you are not feeling well on any given Sunday, please join us online. Thank you for your cooperation.



BIBLE STUDY GROUP

Our online Bible study group is reading from Matthew and Luke at present. If you would like to join us as we read these distinct accounts of Jesus' life and ministry, we would love to have you join us. Summer reading is an enjoyable luxury that isn't as readily available the rest of the year. The most read book in the world is the Bible. It has inspired so many other thoughtful expressions. Why would we think it's made only for Sunday morning. Let's read 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. If you have any questions about how Bible study works, send them along to the same email as above.

HUNGER DOESN'T TAKE THE SUMMER OFF FOOD DRIVE



The annual food drive to benefit the Northampton Survival Center ends on July 10th so that our donations may help make a difference for those families who are struggling even harder to feed their children without the benefit of school meal programs. Non-perishable food items may be brought in on any Sunday and monetary donations are accepted as well through the congregation's Benevolence Fund. Please make checks payable to *FCC Hatfield Benevolence Fund*, with "food drive" written on the memo line. Thank you for

your Christian concern of others.

SUMMERTIME

Summer offers many of us (except farmers) a time to slow down and relax. Many will take vacations during the summer. I, as a matter of fact, will be on vacation and not at our church on Sunday, July 10th. The Deacons will lead the Service that day and I know they will do a great job. I would like to mention that while I am on vacation, I will still attend Sunday worship. Church should not be looked upon as an obligation to be endured. I enjoy participating in worship and am uplifted by it. I hope it is the same for you. If you are home, we would love to see you at our church, and if you are away on vacation think about going to visit another church. If something there strikes you as interesting or fun, bring it back and share it with us. I hope your summer schedule is relaxing and fun, and that worship will be a part of it too.



CHURH DIRECTORY REQUETS

The Board of Deacons is compiling an electronic church directory for our use. Maybe you have seen printed church directories in the past. A directory helps members, long-time members and brand new, to put faces and names together. A directory is also a useful tool to reach out to others in the congregation. The problem with printed directories is that first of all they are expensive, and second, they become outdated rather quickly.

The Board of Deacons is asking all of our members and friends to submit an electronic photo of themselves – individual, couple or family, and to include names and contact information, which would be address, phone and email. The Deacons will then share the directories only with those who have submitted such information, and will stress that the directories are not to be shared freely. We want to keep contact information for our use only. The directory will not be posted online anywhere.

We ask that you send your photo and contact information to our Head Deacon, Jeff F., at jeffrun82@yahoo.com. Since the directory is electronic, it will be updated periodically. We think this will be good for our church and a welcome tool for our members so we hope that you will all choose to participate. Thank you.

FYI

The annual *Water Palooza Walk* sponsored by HEADS Up will take place along the 2-mile loop in the center of town on Saturday, July 23rd. The walk for mental health awareness includes water play, slides, hoses and squirters. Registration is at 9:00am and the walk begins at 10:00am. *Water Palooza* is an important fundraiser for HEADS Up and the good work it does in our community. Registration is \$15/individual and \$25/family.

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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Committee Chairpersons:

Benevolence, Amy N.

Christian Education, Anita W.

Church Moderator, Jonathan B.

Deacons, Jeff F.

Music Minister, Anthony T.

Real Folks Society, Martha Z.

Trustees, Ed M.

