

The Bell Tower

Newsletter of the First Congregational Church of Hatfield, United Church of Christ

2024

July

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A Nation of So Many Others

The Pilgrims and Puritans were driven to these new shores because they were among the persecuted others of their society. More Anglo-Saxon immigrants followed eventually, all seeking chances to be freed from their own institutional persecution and poverty. These established themselves on this continent at the expense of the Native Americans. For the most part, they created a white, Protestant American culture.

In Colonial New England, November 5th was an annual observance of Pope's Night. This was an explicitly anti-Catholic holiday. This religious sentiment was already on these shores when there were few Catholics here. This mood became more charged in the mid-19th century when large numbers of Irish citizens emigrated to the United States because of the famine caused by disease that ruined potato harvests.

The newly arrived Catholic immigrants faced persecution because they were, again, other. This is surprising since the ones persecuting were not long before the other who was persecuted. How could they not see themselves in the other they now persecuted?

I did not realize until I attended the May 30th Hatfield Historical Association's sponsored talk on President Calvin Coolidge that the Protestant establishment in Massachusetts did not treat the Irish police officers all that well. The imprisoned have long garnered little sympathy, but police stations and jails were terribly run down institutions not only because of the incarcerated, but because of all the Irish police officers. It was felt they did not need or deserve better.

When Eastern Europeans then arrived *en masse*, some of the once persecuted Irish police persecuted the newer arrivals for their otherness. Again, how could they not empathize, or maybe why would they not empathize, with people whose situations were exactly the same as what they had once endured as other?

At the Anthracite Coal Museum in Scranton, PA, it is recorded that mining companies treated the mules better than the miners because it was more expensive to replace the mule than an Eastern European immigrant. The nation encouraged immigration to fill the needs of industry, but did not welcome these same people into their communities.

The same thing happened with Chinese immigrants mainly in the West. They worked the Gold Rush, for the railroads and in the mines, but their otherness was so stark that the U.S. Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act prohibiting immigration from China for the years 1882-1892. This law was then extended by the Geary Act in 1892. The Chinese Exclusion Act was the only U.S. law ever to prevent immigration and naturalization on the basis of race. We needed and used them, but did not accept them because they were other.

The otherness of African slaves and Black Americans, Native Americans, and women is too extensive to describe on this page, but so obvious that it may not need to be outlined. There is also the historic antisemitism that has raised its ugly head in our nation's almost 250 years. How is that we cannot or refuse to translate the otherness we or our ancestors experienced into an empathy for whomever is the newest other among us, including those celebrated during the recently completed Pride Month?

This unfortunate tradition not only harms the other it harms us. It sacrifices talent and potential. A *Boston Globe Magazine* cover article focused on the paucity of programs for gifted students in our public schools. It contrasted this with the example of the Advanced Learning Academy in San Antonio, TX. For the upcoming academic year 132 new students were selected and 700 are on the waiting list. Of these, 75% are Hispanic and about 50% receive subsidized lunches. (*June 2, 2024, p. 19*) What will these students create and contribute in the future? What would have been sacrificed if they were excluded as other?

The United States is not defined by race, ethnicity or faith. We are not a white Christian nation. We are defined by what the historian Henry Steele Commager called "The Empire of Reason." We were founded as a nation that embraces the idea of liberty – for all people. The only otherness that is un-American is to turn against the liberty, and the democracy it needs, so that we can "hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

JULY EVENTS

Thurs. 4 th	Independence Day.
Mon. 8 th	Emancipation Day in Massachusetts.
Tue. 9 th	Online Bible study group from 7 – 8:00pm.
Tue. 23 rd	Online Bible 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, except July and August.

EMANCIPATION DAY

Massachusetts Emancipation Day is a state holiday. It is also known as Quock Walker Day. It will be celebrated on Monday, July 8th. The day recognizes the declaration of rights that made slavery unconstitutional in Massachusetts and the contributions of Quock Walker to its abolition. Quock Walker was an enslaved American who sued for and won his freedom case in June 1781. The court cited language in the 1780 Constitution of Massachusetts that declared, "All men are born free and equal." The case is credited with helping abolish slavery in Massachusetts making our state the first to effectively and fully abolish slavery in the United States!

ONLINE BIBLE STUDY GROUP

I invite you to join our online Bible study hour. This is the perfect time to join! We have Bible, Old and New Testaments. It is now time hopefully offers, and with the opportunity of beginning, I hope you will accept this invitation to look more deeply into the biblical word. 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 or if you have any questions about Bible study in general.



group. We meet on alternate weeks for one recently completed our survey of the entire to start over. With the extra time summer beginning Bible study from the literal

CONGREGATION WORKSHOPS ON CHURCH GROWTH AND UTILIZATION

The Church Council has been brainstorming ideas about ways to bring in more people and more revenue, increase utilization of our beautiful building, sanctuary, kitchen, and dining room, and generally being a part of the community. Stay tuned for updates, and please feel free to reach out to Carolyn Forsyth 413-695-6760 or at cafa621@gmail.com, or any Council Member with questions, comments, ideas etc.

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.

GROCERY CARDS

Big Y grocery card sales are a continuing fundraiser of our congregation. Please contact Marty Z. 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:

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