

The Bell Tower

Newsletter of the First Congregational Church of Hatfield, UCC

2021

October

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Stewardship Campaign: Why I Give



The general theme of 2021 in the United Church of Christ has been “Rooted in Love,” and it is the basis of the materials prepared by the UCC Stewardship campaign as well. The slogan is derived from an opening verse of the Book of Psalms: “They are like trees planted by streams of water ...” (1:3a)

After such a wet summer, it may be difficult for us to imagine the arid conditions of the land of Israel, but life itself depended on the seasonal rains. The peoples around Israel worshipped nature gods such as Baal, the god of the storm, because of this intense dependence upon nature’s rhythms.

The orthodoxy of the ancient Jews moved away from nature gods, but not from the God of nature. As the worship of Yahweh matured, religious festivals adopted historical bases, but they originated as agricultural festivals. Three agriculture-related pilgrimage festivals are mandated in Exodus 23:14-17: a seven-day springtime festival of Unleavened Bread, around the barley harvest (Passover); an early summer festival of Harvest, when the wheat ripens (Pentecost or *Shavuot*); and an autumn festival of Ingathering, when olives, grapes, and other fruits are harvested (Tabernacles or *Sukkoth*).

Worship and life itself were dependent upon water. This is where the opening imagery of basically Israel’s hymnal, the Book of Psalms, emerges. Trees along the banks of streams had the most dependable water resource. If the rains were insufficient, if other vegetation suffered, the trees on a stream’s bank could still draw in water.

This became a sacred image in the biblical text. God was the waters of the stream and the faithful were sustained like a tree whose roots could draw in those dependable waters. This imagery and message are what inspire the theme of “Rooted in Love.” We are sustained by our relationship with God, and that relationship cannot be rooted honestly in fear or ignorance. It must be rooted in love.

I choose to donate to our congregation and to our United Church of Christ denomination because I believe that this is a healthy expression of the Christian faith rooted in love. I’m currently making my way through the 1,000-page-plus Diarmaid MacCulloch book *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years*. It is an honest and unbelievably thorough sharing of the story of Christianity. It was written by a professor of the History of the Church at Oxford University, and it’s not hard to see why Oxford has such a distinguished reputation. I would not want to take this guy’s final exam.

The Christian church in all its various expressions is guided by the Holy Spirit, but this does not imply that it is inerrant, that at times it is not shamelessly narrow-minded, and that at times it is not downright destructive, actually uprooting love. The MacCulloch book is willing to face this reality rather than present a fairytale version of church.

What I appreciate in the UCC is its continuous willingness to examine its teachings and practices. It embraces enthusiastically that God continues to reveal Himself to us. This allows for past mistakes to be recognized, admitted and corrected to root us deeper in love. It may also seem merely academic, but the UCC through its Puritan ancestors also professes Postmillennialism, which is a doctrine that good will gradually triumph over evil. This progressive theology is hope-filled rather than the debilitating message of the hopelessly increasing nature of human sin and destructiveness.

Congregationalism’s respect for the collective voice of all members of the church is based on this recognition of our God-given potential. The voice of the congregation has a peculiar ability as the consensus of the People of God to express the Spirit’s inspiration. To be rooted in love is to be able to recognize when change is needed. And change is not fought off as threatening tradition – it is tradition! To be rooted in love means to draw in the wisdom and grace of God, to grow, develop and change.

This is why when our Stewardship Campaign begins, I will pledge my support. Henri Nouwen once observed: “[Church] Fundraising is precisely the opposite of begging. Rather, we are declaring, ‘We have a vision that is amazing and exciting.’” I hope you can find what is extraordinary in our church too and then hopefully support it as best you are able.

OCTOBER EVENTS

Sat. 2 nd	Southern New England Conference's <i>Super Saturday</i> online event.
Sun. 3 rd	CROP Hunger Walk in New Salem beginning at 1PM.
Mon. 4 th	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. 5 th	Rev. Randy will attend the monthly meeting of the Hampshire Association Committee on Ministry at 5:45pm.
Sun. 10 th	Stewardship Sunday and Congregational Meeting on Goal Budget after Service.
Tues. 12 th	Monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees at 7:00pm.
Mon. 25 th	Online <i>Exploring the Bible</i> study group from 7-8:00pm.
Tues. 26 th	Monthly meeting of the Board of Deacons at 6:00pm.
TBA	Rev. Randy will attend the HEADS Up monthly online meeting.

REGULAR GATHERINGS

Sundays: Worship Service begins at 9:30am online and in person.

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

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

Thursdays: Choir rehearses in the sanctuary at 6:30pm – **Now in person at the church.**

SUPER SATURDAY

The theme of this year's gathering on October 2nd is *Building on God's Promises: A Time of Personal Renewal*.

The keynote speaker this year is Dr. Monica Coleman who is Professor of Africana Studies at the University of Delaware. She spent over ten years in School of Theology and Lutheran School of ministry at age 19, Dr. Coleman brings her church traditions, global ecumenical work, of religion. Dr. Coleman is the author or focus on the role of faith in addressing memoir *Bipolar Faith* shares her life-long she discovers a new and liberating vision of God. Her book *Making a Way Out of No Way* is required reading at leading theological schools around the country. Dr. Coleman speaks widely on navigating change, religious diversity, mental wellness, and surviving sexual and domestic violence.



graduate theological education at Claremont Theology at Chicago. Answering her call to experiences in evangelical Christianity, black and indigenous spirituality to her discussions editor of six books and several articles that critical social and philosophical issues. Her dance with trauma and depression, and how

Super Saturday is filled with a variety of virtual workshops, marketplace and networking. Workshops take place throughout the day. Sign up for as many or as few as you like. *Super Saturday* is focusing on renewal on a personal and congregational level. Some of the workshops we are offering - Assessing and Discerning Your Church's Future; Where Have We Been? What Have We Learned?; Become a Racial Justice Trainer; What's the Difference Between Charity, Advocacy and Social Justice?; Pray with Jesus; The Simplicity of Mindfulness; Pandemic Learnings, Reclaiming Commons and many more.

You will see a few new presenters at this Super Saturday. Please welcome the new workshop leaders to the Super Saturday Program: Rev. Ruth Shaver who will be presenting a workshop on clean air; Karim Ahmed, an adjunct professor at UCONN, presenting on justice issues; Pastor Cesar Depaz, Iglesia Hispana - Hispanic Community Church of Boston, presenting on community outreach to the Hispanic community; and Rev. Dr. Bob LaRochelle, pastor and author, will be exploring the Love Hate Relationship you have with your church community. Additionally, you will have the opportunity to meet a couple new SNEUCC staff members who will be presenting workshops as well. If you would like to learn more or register, please click on this link: <https://sneucc-reg.brtapp.com/SSOct2021>.

CROP HUNGER WALK

Two years ago our congregation participated in the CROP Hunger Walk, and then last year the Walk was cancelled because of the pandemic. Not it's back. The Walk will be in New Salem on October 3rd. If you would like to walk as part of our church's team, please let Rev. Randy know and we'll get you one of the donation envelopes. It's a pleasant walk with pleasant people and it is going to be on a pleasant Fall afternoon. The CROP

Walks are the granddaddies of all charitable walks. They began in 1969. They help fund Church World Services' work here in our communities and around the world. CWS is a faith-based organization transforming communities around the globe through just and sustainable responses to hunger, poverty, displacement and disaster. Twenty five percent of the funds raised are returned to the host community to support local hunger fighting efforts.

For more information or to make a donation please visit <https://events.crophungerwalk.org/2021/team/hatfield-congregational-church>. And thank you for your contribution.

EXPLORING THE BIBLE ON-LINE STUDY GROUP

The Massachusetts Bible Society has published a three-volume text called *Exploring the Bible*. We are reading Volume III on the New Testament. If you comfortable with the Bible, I encourage you to see what Bible study is like, (randyc1897@gmail.com) and I will send you Zoom meetings. No prior Bible to become more familiar with the written Word of God. This month we will be reading from what are called the Deutero-Pauline Epistles (Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, and Titus) as we work toward our study of the four Gospels.



would like to become more you to join us for Bible study. If you please send me an email you the login information for our knowledge is needed, only a desire

NEIGHBORS IN NEED OFFERING



In 2021, *Neighbors in Need* "Unfailing Love" offering is focused on supporting organizations and projects that are serving homeless and immigrant neighbors or communities. One-third of NIN funds support the Council for American Indian Ministry (CAIM). Two-thirds of this offering is used by the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries (JWM) to provide funding grants to UCC churches and organizations leading justice initiatives, advocacy efforts, and direct service projects in their communities.

We will accept your donations for the Neighbors in Need Offering on Sunday, October 3rd. Thank you for your generosity and Christian care.

VISITATIONS

If you would like me to stop by for a visit, please let me know. I have received both of my vaccination shots, and I have no problem wearing a mask on top of that. Also, if you or a loved one ends up in the hospital, please let me know so that I can come by for a pastoral visit and a prayer.

CHURCH MASK POLICY

The Church Council has based its mask policy on the number of cases in Hampshire County. If the cases rose above 10 per day per 100,000 people, we would require masks in the church building. The numbers have surged past this mark. Therefore, masks must be worn to attend worship Services in person. When they fall again, masks will again be optional. Thank you for your cooperation.

PLANNING AHEAD

Our **Roast Pork Supper** is back too. It will take place on November 13th from 5 – 7:00pm. At present, we are planning this as a take-out-only meal due to the increased number of COVID cases. We love it when volunteers surprise us with offers to help.

Lastly, the **Craft Fair** returns on December 4th. This year's event had to be modified because much of the prep-work could not be done during the pandemic. We are planning to have a bake sale/prepared food sale, raffle baskets, and outdoor items such as cemetery boxes, door swags, etc. We are hoping that individuals, families or groups will donate themed baskets. Be creative. Have some fun. I think you know what comes next, but we'll ask anyway – we will need volunteers to help with the Craft Fair and you would be such a blessing.



Thanks for putting these events on your calendars, and thanks for supporting your local church.

PRAYER SHAWL MINISTRY

The Conference is conducting a prayer shawl ministry. They have asked local congregations to make the shawls, pray over them and then send people who do good for the church, members has offered to help with this making the shawls. If you are interested, please contact Rev. Randy.



them to the Conference to be shared with communities and others. One of our ministry and to get novices going on

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.

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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.

HAVE A FUN AND SAFE HALLOWEEN



JUST THROWING OUT A THOUGHT: HALLOWEEN FALLS ON A SUNDAY THIS YEAR. SHOULD WE DO SOMETHING FUN? TRUNK OR TREAT FOR THE KIDS OF CHURCH AND TOWN? INVITING THE CONGREGATION TO ATTEND IN COSTUME? HOW ABOUT BACH'S TOCCATA AND FUGUE OR OTHER HALLOWEEN MUSIC? WE'RE HATFIELD - HOW ABOUT CARVED PUMPKINS ALONG THE CHURCH FRONT ENTRANCE? ANY OTHER SUGGESTIONS?