

The Bell Tower

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

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If Only They Could Have Played Together

Sarah Willie-LeBreton, the President of Smith College, was interviewed in the *Summer 2024 Smith Quarterly*. She was asked about the benefits of a liberal arts education. She answered, “When we’re separated from others with different perspectives and ideas, we are more likely to become self-righteous, less curious, and despairing. And that combination can lead us to distrust each other and disinvest in community. It can also make us more vulnerable to a party, person, or idea that promises to save us.” (p. 11)

The *Boston Globe* real estate section’s cover article on Sunday, August 11th, was the startling news that the median single home price in the greater Boston area will hit \$1 million! Boston is a surging housing market because of limited supply for one, but also because of its economy. It is a worldwide high tech and biotech center. Companies will pay top dollar to locate in the area. Their proximity to each other nurtures creativity and cross-pollination. One discovery leads to another. This draws together a good number of highly paid workers, all who must live somewhere, and thus the median price of a home approaching \$1 million.

On my recent vacation, I took along a book about the theologian Karl Barth. I wanted to read it in preparation for a *Faith Matters* article in the *Greenfield Recorder*. Barth lived through two world wars and he wrote against the tendency to make God partisan. God was envisioned through the lens on one situation and then another rather than through God’s self-revelation.

Barth sought to remove God from this dependency. He wrote copiously to present God as other. When reading about Barth, I was amazed at how engaged he was with his contemporaries. He was strident in his theology, but was always willing to talk with others who disagreed with him as long as it focused on the topic and not the person. These encounters influenced his thinking and made it more powerful.

To these three stories I would like to add a short biblical passage that our Bible study group discussed recently. I don’t have the space to set-up the context, but it’s in your Bibles at home. What we need to know is that Ishmael is looked upon as the Arab’s and

eventually Islam’s connection to Abraham, while Isaac is the Judeo-Christian connection to the shared Patriarch.

When Isaac and Ishmael are still young and innocent, they play together as brothers. This loving bond is forced apart only because of adult jealousy and pride. Here’s the passage: “But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, [Ishmael,] whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. So she said to Abraham, ‘Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac.’” (Genesis 21:9-10)

This story most likely is a representation of the division already in place around 1,000 BCE between these peoples. This division has festered over the millennia. It feeds the confrontation over what the Judeo-Christian tradition calls the Promised Land. It leads to the unnatural violence of Hamas’ October 7th attack on Israel and Israel’s brutal response in Gaza, and it could lead to a larger regional conflagration.

This division of peoples is enforced by walls and embargoes. Relationships are replaced by caricatures. Reconciliation is almost impossible when there has never been “conciliation.” I have to believe, hope maybe, that at some point the cycles of violence will exhaust all involved so that they turn to the child’s innocence of Isaac and Ishmael playing together. I want to believe this is even the hope present in the biblical author who included this story in Hebrew Scripture.

The British street artist Banksy gives a beautiful and striking depiction of this hope as two Arab and Jewish children water and nurture a tree of life in the midst of war’s death and destruction (Copyright law won’t allow me to show the picture, but I can share the link to it: <https://www.facebook.com/streetartbybanksy/posts/the-banksy-way-made-by-ai-6-photos-of-street-art-by-banksy-in-gaza-palestine-ht/277715115249643/>).

Separation, argues Willie-LeBreton, may lead to self-righteousness. True righteousness, accordingly, leads to the building of connection and community. Let us, therefore, work at building the community aspect of church by seeing each other as one of the many blessings of a practiced faith, and let us offer to share this blessing with others to grow the community.

SEPTEMBER EVENTS

Tue. 3 rd	Rev. Randy will attend the online meeting of the Association Committee on Ministry at 5:45pm.
Sun. 8 th	Homecoming Sunday. Worship Service at 11:00am , followed by church gathering.
Tue. 10 th	Rev. Randy will attend the Association clergy lunch in Hadley at noon.
Wed. 11 th	Monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees at 7:00pm.
Mon. 16 th	Online Bible study group from 7 – 8:00pm.
Sun. 22 nd	Conference’s Project Proclaim hosted by our church from 3 – 5:00pm.
Tue. 24 th	Monthly meeting of the Board of Deacons at 6:00pm.
Mon. 30 th	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.

HOMECOMING SUNDAY

Homecoming Sunday is September 8th. Our worship Service will begin at 11:00am on this one particular Sunday and will be followed by fellowship. This is a chance to gather first as the worshipping community and then as friends and neighbours over a bite to eat at a potluck meal. Everyone who is able is asked to bring a dish to share with the others. If you cannot bring anything, come anyway. There will also be square dancing, yes, square dancing.

Square Dancers will perform in the interested in joining their group, they Wednesdays. This is part of the our facilities and to be more involved

We hope you will choose to join us for like to ask you to share this invitation looking for a church or simply a community. There is an upwelling of interest for searching out answers to spiritual questions, and there is a need to reengage with others. Church can help with both.

The banner outside our church building welcomes all who pass by with these words: “Come as you are. Receive as you need. Serve as you can.” Let us look forward to a new season of living into this promise.



dining hall on this day. If anyone is will be meeting at the church on Fall Incubator Group’s efforts to better utilize with community activities.

Homecoming Sunday. We also would with others you know who may be

SUNDAY SCHOOL and TIME WITH GOD’S CHILDREN

We are blessed by all that Anita Wilson does for our children and youth by leading our Sunday School most every Sunday of the have some of their Sunday morning. School. If you have



Every Sunday the children and going to experiment become more familiar with them.

year. Sunday School includes lessons and activities. The young people first chances to learn about our faith and also to have some fun each We invite our younger families to become active members of our Sunday any questions, please contact either Anita or Rev. Randy.

during our worship Service, we set aside a few moments specifically for youth in attendance. We call it *Time with God’s Children*. Rev. Randy is with sharing Bible stories during this time so that our young people will

We cherish the youth of our church and try to offer them a welcoming and uplifting experience. It is our hope that they will come, learn and enjoy.

ONLINE BIBLE STUDY GROUP

Growing deeper into the faith does not end with Sunday School. As with so many of life’s worthwhile endeavours, we strive to learn more and appreciate more the gift that is our faith. journey to understanding God and our relationship with God more clearly. As change, as we change, our faith changes. It is a living relationship. The Bible foundation upon which we build faith. It is a collection of inspired writings millennia. Inspired means that God is speaking to us through the words of the



Faith is the our lives is the that cover Bible, but

those words are not locked into their original time or situation. They are the vehicle for the still-speaking Word of God. This is why we read and study the Bible together in our Bible Study Group.

The group meets on alternate weeks for one hour, and meets online. Wherever you may be in your Bible literacy, the practice of sharing in these sacred writings opens up new possibilities. If you may be interested in joining our group, please send an email to randyc1897@gmail.com for the Zoom login.

HOSTING PROJECT PROCLAIM

Project Proclaim is made possible through a Lilly Foundation grant of \$1.25 million to the Conference. On September 22nd at Hatfield Congregational Church, Rev. Dr. Chris Davies will offer an overview of *Project Proclaim*, which includes the following: it is a hub for innovative, experimental and non-traditional preaching; it is a place to explore the art and science of proclamation; and it is these four compelling programs –



1. PROCLAMATION LABS
2. LEARNING COHORTS (Fall 2024)
3. PREACHING CAMP (Spring 2025)
4. REVIVAL (Fall 2025).

Hatfield Congregational hosts the third offering in the Proclamation Lab series. The first, “The Art of Proclamation,” was held in Rhode Island in March. The second, “Rituals of Hope,” at the Hartford Stage Company, took place on August 21st. On September 22nd our church will host the third gathering, “Writing for the Local Newspaper,” from 3- 5:00pm.

Tyrone Brown, who has more than 20 years of experience in the arts and theater, has been hired as the Program Manager for the Compelling Preaching Initiative. He will be present as well. For more on Tyrone Brown please click on this link: <https://www.sneucc.org/newsdetail/program-manager-hired-for-compelling-preaching-initiative-18270079> .

The principal speaker at the September 22nd event will be Scout Opatut, Religion Page Editor of the *Greenfield Recorder*. She will help participants learn how to write articles for the local newspapers on church events and matters of importance.

Project Proclaim is an ambitious program that can help us grow our churches. It is open to anyone from the Conference and from our congregation who would like to learn the skills of sharing the Good News inside and outside of the church community.

CROP HUNGER WALK

The annual Walk will be hosted by the Shelburne Congregational Church on Sunday, October 6th at 2:00pm.



This is a fundraiser for Church World Services and the good work they do around the globe and in our neighbourhoods. Their efforts concentrate on sustainable endeavours that can help people in need to raise themselves up. Fundraising materials were distributed at the Rally on August 14th. If you would like to be a part of our team, please make sure to ask for a fundraising envelope. If you would like to join our team or make an online donation, please click on this link: [https://events.crophungerwalk.org/cropwalks/team/hatfield-congrega-](https://events.crophungerwalk.org/cropwalks/team/hatfield-congrega-tional-church-united-church-of-christ)

[tional-church-united-church-of-christ](https://events.crophungerwalk.org/cropwalks/team/hatfield-congrega-tional-church-united-church-of-christ) I hope you will think about walking with us and people from throughout the area as we bring attention to the Christian obligation to love and care for one another.

UPCOMING EVENTS

A tag and bake sale will take place at the church mid-October. If you have items to donate to the tag sale, please price them at home. If you are not sure about setting the price, Linda says, “Just wing it.” We could also use volunteers to help with set-up and break-down of tables. A bake sale will be held in conjunction with the tag sale. We are asking and hoping that all our members will bake something to share at this church fundraiser.

We know it is still several months away, but the Christmas Craft Fair will be here before you know it. This is the time when we ask for jewelry. This gives us the time to get the donations marked and priced. If you have jewelry to donate, please bring it to church on any Sunday.

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.

The Conference has created and constantly updates a new social media presence called *Find Hope Now*. It can be found at www.findhopenow.org. The site is a concerted effort to offer messages of hope when so much involving religion is defined predominantly by judgment and aspersion. As the site grows, it will allow individual congregations such as ours the opportunity to maintain a presence and to reach out to people in the southern New England region who are looking for churches of hope. Take a look if you have a chance.

GROCERY CARDS

Big Y grocery 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

Website: www.hatfieldchurch.org Facebook: www.facebook.com/First-Congregational-Church-of-Hatfield-UCC

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

Music Minister: Anthony Tracia anthonytracia@gmail.com

Committee Chairpersons:

<i>Benevolence, Amy N.</i>	<i>Music Committee, Sue M.</i>
<i>Christian Education, Anita W.</i>	<i>Real Folks Society, Amy N.</i>
<i>Church Moderator, Jonathan B.</i>	<i>Trustees, Ed M.</i>
<i>Deacons, Jeff F.</i>	

Two Invitations

UNDERSTANDING AND COUNTERACTING

ANTISEMITISM

An Interactive Discussion

Sunday, September 8, 2024, 3:00–5:00 pm

THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF SUNDERLAND
91 South Main Street, in Sunderland Center



www.shutterstock.com - 238951990

In this **interactive discussion**, which is free and open to people of all backgrounds and beliefs participants will learn to recognize and counteract antisemitism. We will explore **the mechanics of antisemitism, why it is so confusing and hard to talk about, and what it means to be an ally.**

Registration is encouraged but not required: <https://tinyurl.com/y7ctxpks>



Facilitators **Amy Leos-Urbel** and **Betsy L. Ames** have taught classes together on this subject at the Sojourner Truth School for Social Change Leadership and at other community organizations in western Massachusetts and beyond.

For more information, please contact us at SunderlandHRTaskforce@gmail.com.

This program is sponsored by the Sunderland Human Rights Task Force, The First Congregational Church of Sunderland, the Sunderland Public Library, and the Committee on Understanding Antisemitism.

Additional support and funding provided by Harold Grinspoon Foundation, Beit Ahavah/Florence, Temple Israel of Greenfield, the Deerfield Inclusion Group, and the Hatfield Equity Alliance fighting against Racism Together. Light refreshments will be served.

“Only in America”: A Brief History of Antisemitism in the United States



A Talk by
Michael Hoberman,
Professor of English Studies, Fitchburg State University.

Thursday, September 26th, at 6:00 PM

THE SUNDERLAND PUBLIC LIBRARY
20 School Street, Sunderland, MA

Professor Hoberman will discuss how antisemitism in America shares certain aspects with, yet is also quite distinct from, antisemitism in Europe. There will also be an informative, interactive exhibit prepared by the Committee on Understanding Antisemitism. Refreshments provided.

Advance registration is encouraged but not required at <https://tinyurl.com/2s4wujxz>



This event is sponsored by the Sunderland Human Rights Task Force, the First Congregational Church of Sunderland, the Sunderland Public Library, and the Committee on Understanding Antisemitism. Generous financial support has also been provided by the Harold Grinspoon Foundation, with additional support from Temple Israel (Greenfield).