

The Bell Tower

Newsletter of the First Congregational Church of Hatfield

2018

November

No. 10

Thanksgiving Is Not the Start of the Christmas Season

I think most of you know that I work in retail a couple of days a week. Christmas had been seeping into the store since early in October, and then it began to rush in during the latter part of the month. It is not even Halloween yet and the Christmas decorations are the first thing a guest sees walking into the store.

Often, I hear of this supposed “war on Christmas.” I guess it is organized by atheists, liberals and Muslims – I guess. I think the most serious threat to Christmas, however, is that we Christians are allowing it to become defined by stuff rather than Spirit. It seems much more disingenuous to replace the poverty of the manger with the credit card excesses of stuff than to manufacture a war on Christmas.

It seems a bit hypocritical to complain that we are not greeted with a “Merry Christmas” from a complete stranger while many Christians will not bother to attend any religious service to celebrate the Saviour’s birth. But this is a discussion for another time. What I would like to discuss now is the sacrifice of Thanksgiving on the altar of all this Christmas commercialism. Thanksgiving is not merely the marker for commercial Christmas overdrive. Thanksgiving is the antithesis of commercial Christmas overdrive.

Thanksgiving reaches back to the earliest days of our national story, and it overflows with the good, old New England Puritanism that gave birth to our church 348 year ago.



The first Pilgrim settlers barely survived the winter of 1620. If these desperate immigrants did not receive assistance from the Native Americans, Plimoth Plantation would have had a quick and unpleasant end. The memory of that first winter was printed

indelibly in their psyche as the Pilgrims planted and cultivated throughout the next growing season. Then, with their successful harvest in 1621, they gathered together in joyous thanksgiving for all of God’s blessings. There were the 50 remaining original Pilgrims and about twice as many Native Americans who were invited to the feast in appreciation for their life-saving assistance.

Thanksgiving today is a boon for grocery stores and for all associated with travel. We keep the traditions of feast and gathering. However, do we take the eponymous virtue of thanks-giving seriously on Thanksgiving?

Does Thanksgiving receive its due since it is not about what we yet need to spend on Christmas stuff, but rather that it is a time to pause and say “thank you” to God for what we have already received? That’s not a money-maker and so Thanksgiving gets run over by those Black Friday sales that encroach on this holiday to steal its time and purpose. What can we do to return Thanksgiving to its rightful place as a sincere occasion of collective gratitude before God?

I think we need to remember that we are not offering some undirected, nebulous thanks-giving that replaces grace at the family table. We are giving thanks to God. In 1623, Governor Bradford issued the order to observe a time of thanks-giving, but the first thanks-giving two years prior sprang from the gratefulness of those 50 surviving Pilgrims.

They saw the hand of God in their good fortune and also in their own hard work. Whether it was God’s direct help or their ability to help themselves, the Pilgrims rejoiced and in their celebration they gave thanks for both. Sometimes I think we only look to miracles as deserving thanks-giving to God, when in fact the greatest miracle is that God has created us with the inordinate ability to discover, invent and labour as part of our own betterment in a creation that is ordered and open to our efforts.

The nation may observe Thanksgiving with as much football as it chooses, but as Christians we must try consciously to include thanks-giving before God on this day for all of the extraordinary and ordinary blessings He shares with us.

There is an amazing and timeless Gospel story of Jesus healing ten lepers, but only one returns to offer thanks. Do we belong to the few who bother with thanks-giving? Let us make sure that we do by

pausing, considering the blessings of our lives, and giving thanks to God. Let's not treat Thanksgiving as the speedbump of the holiday season. Rather let us be a joyously grateful and thankful people.

NOVEMBER EVENTS

- Sat. 3rd Roast Pork Supper from 5 – 7PM.
- Sun. 4th Horn of Plenty food collection begins for the Survival Center.
- Tue. 6th Election Day food sale at Town Hall, please drop off by 8:30am.
Bible study in the church parlor from 7 – 8:00pm.
- Wed. 7th Town of Hatfield 350th Committee meeting at 6:00pm.
- Thur. 8th Hampshire Association Clergy Committee of Practice meeting in Hadley at 12:00pm.
- Sun. 11th Veteran's Day. Prayers offered during morning worship, bells rung at conclusion.
Marge Kowalski's 100th birthday. Let's all send cards! Chat & Coffee birthday celebration.
Installation Service of Rev. Calvo at 3:00pm.
- Mon. 12th Volunteer opportunity at the Food Bank from 1- 4:00pm.
- Wed. 14th Monthly meeting of the Trustees' Board.
- Thurs. 15th Rev. Calvo will attend the HEADS Up meeting at 6:00pm.
- Sun. 18th Benevolence Committee meets at 11:20am.
- Mon. 26th Board of Deacons meets at 5:00pm.
- Tue. 27th Bible study in the church parlor from 7 – 8:00pm.

REGULAR GATHERINGS

- Sundays: Worship Service begins at 10:00am. Sunday School at 10:15 am. Chat and Coffee at 11:00am.
- 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 rehearsal every Thursday at 6:30pm.
- Saturdays: AA meets at the church every Saturday at noon.

ROAST PORK SUPPER

The Trustees' Board is sponsoring a delicious Roast Pork Supper on Saturday, November 3rd. Take-outs will be available from 5 – 6:30pm and dine-in will be served from 5:30 – 7:00pm. The cost for adults is \$12 and \$6 for children. The full menu may be viewed on our webpage or FaceBook page. To reserve tickets please call Linda at 247-5604.

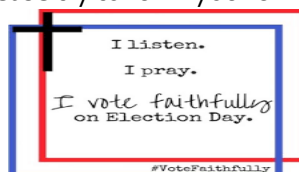


HORN OF PLENTY COLLECTION

Our annual Horn of Plenty Collection will begin on Sunday, November 4th and will continue through November 18th. This collection benefits the Northampton Survival Center, which serves the needs of Hampshire County residents who simply cannot afford to put basic food items on the table. Your donation of non-perishable food items each Sunday or your monetary donations to this collection help us to express our thanksgiving in practice. Thank you in advance for your generosity.

“VOTE FAITHFULLY”

Tuesday, November 6th is Election Day. Please try to fulfill your civic responsibility and get out to vote. With this in mind, the Episcopal Church, the America and the UCC are cooperating in an consider our Christian faith and social they have asked us all to share in: It is a governments from the Lutheran Book of



Evangelical Lutheran Church of effort to get church members to ethics when we vote. This is a prayer Prayer for state, provincial, and local Worship: “Almighty God, we lift

before you all who govern this state/city/town. May those who hold power understand that it is a trust from you to be used, not for personal glory or profit, but for the service of the people. Drive from us cynicism, selfishness, and corruption; grant in your mercy just and honest government; and give us grace to live together in unity and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

ELECTION DAY FOOD SALE

Also, on election day, when many of our neighbours come through Town Hall to do just that, to vote, we will have a table set-up at the entrance to the building. This table is very much desired, but we have been there for years. Help us to make the most of this opportunity. Please bake your kitchen specialty and bring it to Town Hall by 8:30am. This food sale is an important fundraiser for our church. Thanks for your help.

At our food sale table, we will also have a large birthday card for everyone in town to sign to celebrate Marge Kowalski’s 100th birthday. We thank Melody Edwards for making the card.

BIBLE STUDY GROUP – November’s Theme → A new order to replace the old

This month we move on to the final act of Jesus’ story. We have been reading about His journey to Jerusalem and the failure of the disciples to understand why. There must have been frustration in Jesus’ heart, but He continues nonetheless. Now Jesus and Jerusalem finally meet. Rather than enter the Holy City as one lost among the other Galilean pilgrims, Jesus’ entry is triumphant. The crowds sing Hosanna and call Him the Messiah, and the ones in authority grow nervous. The old order of institutional power is challenged – and it still is – by Jesus. Power wants to know by what authority Jesus acts; Jesus’ authority is found in His acts. And those acts point in the opposite direction of power. They speak of self-sacrifice. They speak of a greater good. They speak of others. This is the climax of the Gospel story. This is what believing in Christ means. I invite you to come and read with us, to share your thoughts and reactions to the text, to share in the living Word of God.

VETERAN’S DAY

This year marks the centennial anniversary of the armistice that ended World War I on the 11th day at the 11th hour of the 11th month. This occasion is the reason that Veteran’s Day is celebrated on November 11th. In honour of our veterans, living and deceased, we will ring the church’s bell 100 times at the conclusion of our Service.

INSTALLATION SERVICE

I was accepted formally by the congregation as your pastor on November 12, 2017. I will be installed formally by the Hampshire Association Service will begin at 3:00pm. between Hatfield Congregational parties, and our shared ministry covenant with the Hampshire Associate Conference Minister,



on Sunday, November 11, 2018. The During this Service, a covenant is pledged tional Church and its pastor by both is then affirmed and broadened by our Association, UCC. Rev. Jill Graham, will then install me. This is a time to celebrate Hatfield Congregational Church and I do hope that you will choose to be a part of this Service.

FOOD BANK VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers from our church gather with Linda Milewski at the Western Mass Food Bank on the second Monday of the month to help this worthwhile organization. If you can share three hours of your time or even an hour or two, it will benefit those of our neighbours who do not have the ability to put enough food on their tables. Please speak with Linda if you can help.

RE-DESIGNED WEBSITE IS UP AND RUNNING

Our website has been redesigned to be more user-friendly. It also allows the church to update the information and presentation as needed. You can check in a few times a week and there will be new content. The church has chosen to invest in this platform for the benefit of our members and for those who are interested in Hatfield Congregational Church. Please share the site with others: www.hatfieldchurch.org.

CONSIDER MEMBERSHIP AT HATFIELD CONGREGATIONAL

If you may like to be a formal member of this church, it begins with a group meeting with Rev. Calvo and members of the Board of Deacons. We talk about the church, its organization, how things work, and our core values and covenants. Talk with Reverend Calvo or Amy Novak, Head Deacon, if you are interested. If you have questions before getting to this stage, please do not hesitate to contact Rev. Calvo.

NOTE FROM OUR TREASURER

If anyone needs to know where they stand as far as 2018 pledging is concerned, please email Ed Keefe at eckeefe@gmail.com for a copy of your statement.

CONFIRMATION CLASS

Our Confirmation class has started with four young people. We are meeting at the church on Saturday afternoons at 3PM and we will be choosing from three different weekend Confirmation retreats to attend in March, 2019. Please keep these young people in your prayers as they prepare for this sacred event in their lives.

SHARE AN INVITATION

If someone you know is not attending church anywhere, please share an invitation with them to come and join us at Hatfield Congregational Church because "Whoever you are, and wherever you are on life's journey, you are welcome here."

VIEW CHURCH SERVICES ON-LINE AND ON TV

We air our Services a couple of times a month on public access television. They take place on alternate Sundays. This allows people to see what happens inside our church building and it also reaches into the homes of people who are unable to be with us in church. The recorded Services air on Hatfield Community Television on Saturdays and Sundays at 8 am and 4 pm. All of our taped Services may also be seen at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pjVqoCIEfNo&list=PL97Cp8D5oEflNg2Vj4DQk9p-ISAtaEkf>.

We could use the help of a few more volunteers to operate the camera on a rotating basis during the Services. If you could help in this way, please speak to Rev. Randy.

CHRISTMAS CRAFT FAIR



We are looking for contributions for our jewelry table (lightly used, clean jewelry), our Collectibles table, and our Christmas décor table. And of course, any handcrafted items folks can make. To make our centerpieces/arrangements, we need donations of smaller vases, in Christmas colors or motif. Please see Linda Milewski 247-5604 or Marcia Sheehan 247-9285 with questions or how to contribute.

CONTACT INFO: HATFIELD CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

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