

The Bell Tower

Newsletter of the First Congregational Church of Hatfield, UCC

2022

January

No. 1

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

This past Spring the Pew Research Center conducted a survey and asked people in advanced economies if their society was more or less divided than prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Of the twelve Asian, European and North American countries surveyed, every single one registered a sense of greater division. The nation with the greatest degree of separation was the United States. https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2021/06/23/people-in-advanced-economies-say-their-society-is-more-divided-than-before-pandemic/pg_2021-06-23_global-covid_0-01/

It is not difficult to gauge this personally in our lives. Some survey results can leave you wondering, “Who did they ask?” These results, sadly, leave at least me saying, “Yeah, absolutely.” This is why the message of this month’s *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity* is so very much needed.

The *Week of Prayer* is organized by the World Council of Churches. This is an eclectic group of Christian communities, including Protestant, Orthodox and Catholic. There are significant differences among the churches, but there is the essential, unifying faith in Jesus Christ.

I am not surprised nor scandalized by these differences. For one, we are all trying to comprehend and express our understanding of and relationship with Jesus. Since I am writing this article around the time of Christmas, let’s just focus on the ineffable mystery that in the full humanity of Jesus, born as one of us – born as all of us, is simultaneously the fullness of divinity. We’re dealing with a reality that tests the powers of human comprehension and expression. This is nothing to be embarrassed about or something that should cause us to mask our limitations with strident assertions and silly deprecations. These sorts of theological realities should keep us humble, respecting what we believe and respecting what others believe, as well.

On the flip side of the coin, there is the reality of human differences. People are different than one another, which does not mean better or worse than one another. We come to Jesus looking for different things and worshiping in different ways. Why should this be scandalous? Raymond E. Brown, the late, noted biblical scholar, wrote an eye-opening little book entitled “The Churches the Apostles Left Behind.” Note that he refers to “churches” in the plural. His thesis is that ever since there were believers in Jesus, there were differences in their beliefs.

There was, in other words, never a time when there was a single, pristine expression of the faith to which we must strive to return.

With the New Year upon us and New Year’s resolutions, I invite you to consider joining us for Bible study. We will soon be reading from the Gospels. There are four of them within the New Testament, and they tell different stories of Jesus, with different goals and for different communities. And yet, there they are, one after the other, all judged inspired, all deemed equal, in our Bibles. From our earliest history as believers, there has been difference, but this did not equate with separation.

This is a holiness that motivates the *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*. Unity is not uniformity. Unity can exist, strong and healthy, without uniformity as long as there is mutual respect. This ideal is fundamental in the United Church of Christ. Included in the official logo of our denomination are Jesus’ words in John 17:21: “That they may all be one.” We refer to ourselves as a united and uniting church. The rainbow colours profess our openness to all people and that we affirm who they are, whoever they are. At the top of the cross, is a royal crown, symbolizing that it is Jesus alone who holds ultimate authority in our church and among us. Jesus is the source of our unity no matter how varied and confusing the expressions of our faith may be beneath His crown.



But now back to the divisions we see increasing in the world, and as the survey indicates, most severely in our country. In the UCC logo, the cross is planted firmly in the earth. We are not a church that only looks to heaven. We are also grounded in this world. Our faith calls upon us to make a difference here and now, to change the world, to help establish Jesus’ reign in the world. In part, this means that we need to stand as examples and proclaimers of unity, of unity that supersedes differences so that difference does not equate with division and its consequences.

Our faith calls upon us to respect each other. Let us pray that we are able to set an example in and for the world that can turn us around so that we need not follow the path that may lead even unto violence. Let this month’s *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity* set a tone of dialogue and understanding for 2022.

JANUARY EVENTS

Mon. 3 rd	Rev. Randy will attend the monthly meeting of HEART (Hatfield Equity Alliance fighting against Racism Together) at 5:30pm.
Tue. 4 th	Online <i>Exploring the Bible</i> study group from 7-8:00pm.
Thur. 6 th	Epiphany – the twelfth day after Christmas
Sun. 9 th	New Members' Sunday. Real Folks Annual Meeting at 10:45am.
Mon. 10 th	Monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees at 7:00pm.
Tue. 11 th	Rev. Randy will attend the monthly meeting of the Hampshire Association Committee on Ministry at 5:45pm.
Sun. 16 th	Worship Service begins at 11:00am today. Annual Congregational Meeting follows at 12:00pm in the Sanctuary.
Mon. 17 th	Martine Luther King Jr. Day Online <i>Exploring the Bible</i> study group from 7-8:00pm.
Tue. 18 th	<i>Week of Prayer for Christian Unity</i> until the 25 th .
Mon. 24 th	Monthly meeting of the Board of Deacons at 6:00pm. Meeting of the Church Council at 7:00pm.
Tue. 25 th	Monthly Clergy Brown Bag Lunch at noon.
Mon. 31 st	Online <i>Exploring the Bible</i> 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 – **Now in person at the church.**

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

Thursdays: Choir rehearses in the sanctuary at 7:00pm – **Now in person at the church.**

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 would like to become more comfortable with the Bible, I encourage you to join us for Bible study. If you would like to see what Bible study is like, please send me an email (randyc1897@gmail.com) and I will send you the login information for our Zoom meetings.

EPIPHANY

According to tradition, the Magi arrive in Bethlehem on the twelfth day after Christmas. Truth be told, Matthew's story of the Wisemen, which by the way are never listed as three, is a separate account of Jesus' birth from that of Luke and the shepherds. It is together in an uncontrived chronology. the revealing of Jesus to the world. The in the rather domestic setting of a house.



Matthew's story emphasizes the Epiphany, Magi encounter Jesus not in a manger, but Their divinely led journey introduces the child Jesus as the "king of the Jews." The gifts of the Magi prophesy and proclaim Jesus' reign (gold), His divinity (frankincense), and even His mortality (the burial spice myrrh). Epiphany always falls on January 6th. The duration of the Season of Epiphany, however, depends on the moveable date of Easter. This year the Season of Epiphany lasts from January 6th through the eight following Sundays.

NEW MEMBER SUNDAY

On Sunday, January 9th, during our Service, the congregation will covenant with our newest members, and they with the church. Any and all are always welcome to join with us for worship, learning and community. Formal membership is not a requirement for any of these. However, there is an additional sacred component when we pledge to one another, when we covenant with each other, for the good of the church at large and for each of us individually. We formally bind ourselves together in Christ, and this is the blessing we celebrate on New Member Sunday.



REAL FOLKS ANNUAL MEETING

"The annual meeting will be held on January 9th at 10:45am. Reports, election of officers, allocating our money earned in 2021, and any new business. Please come. Marty."

ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

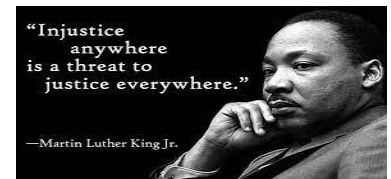
Our church is thoroughly democratic. We recognize all its members as its ministers, that all its members serve in the work of the church because all its members have received the grace to serve through baptism. In this tradition and spirit, we hold an Annual Congregational Meeting each January to report to the church membership about the current state of the congregation and our plans for the new year and beyond.

As such, we receive and share reports from the Pastor, Moderator, Treasurer, Clerk, Boards and Committees. Also, we vote in new officers and vote on the church's annual budget. If you would be willing to share in the work of the church through any of our elected positions, please speak with any member of the Nominations Committee. They are Jonathan Bardwell, Bill Belden and Jeff Folts. And if you are approached by the Nominations Committee, please consider accepting the invitation to serve.

The Annual Meeting will be held on Sunday, January 16th. On that day, our worship Service will begin at the special time of 11:00am, and the meeting will start immediately after the Service. Please be sure to make a note of the time change.

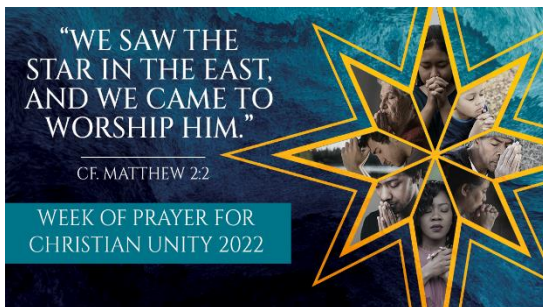
MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY

"Join us online for a time of worship, reflection, and facilitated conversation led by one of the 2022 SNEUCC Theologians in Residence, Rev. Dr. Diane Schmitz. Dr. Schmitz, ordained in the UCC, is one of the SNEUCC Theologians in Residence for 2022. Her primary focus is working with predominantly white communities to increase the awareness, knowledge, and skills needed to be effective partners in the dismantling racism efforts led by communities of color. She will engage us in dialogue, so that as individuals and congregations, we build skills for addressing racism. Let us honor the legacy of Rev. Dr. of Martin Luther King, Jr. by rededicating ourselves to building up the beloved community." If you would like to register for this free event on Monday, January 17th, from 1:30 to 3:00pm please click on this link: <https://www.sneucc.org/eventdetail/15426906?month=1&year=2022&day=1&display=m>



WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

This is an annual observance promoted by the World Council of Churches. This year's theme is based on Matthew 2:1-12. During this time, churches and Christians are asked to pray for the unity that Christ envisioned. Unity does not demand uniformity; it does require respect. Paul wrote of the church as the "body of Christ." All of the different parts of the body come together for the good of the whole. On the Sunday during this special week, January 23rd, referred to as "Ecumenical Sunday," special prayers will be offered as part of our observance of this worldwide prayer among Christians of all sorts for Christian unity.



GRAND PIANO DONATION

Our church has been donated the generous gift of a 9' concert grand *Baldwin* piano by the family of former music director, instrument and weekly Sunday piano has a currently ment and will last us for



Bruce Bishop. It is a will be of great value to us Service. Rich in power and sound that matches our adapting to its new soon be serviced to ensure many generations.



wonderful in our tone, this organ! It is environ- that it will

We ask that you please follow these courtesies regarding the handling of the piano: nothing should be placed on top of the piano at any time, especially liquids; and until it is mounted to a moveable dolly, no one should

attempt to move the piano. It is too heavy to move on its current casters, and doing so could cause it to buckle under its own weight.

Our Music Minister and Chancel Choir are thrilled to lift our spirits in glorious song for years to come using this spectacular addition to our church. Any questions regarding music in our church can be forwarded to Anthony Tracia, our Music Minister at anthonytracia@gmail.com or by calling (781) 738-6284.

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 in keeping us all as safe as possible.

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 them to the Conference to be shared with communities and others. One of our members has offered to help with this ministry and to get novices going on making the shawls. If you are interested, please contact Rev. Randy.



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

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

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

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.

