

The Bell Tower

Newsletter of the First Congregational Church of Hatfield, UCC

2020

July

No. 7

“Sacred spaces of radical possibility”

As Hatfield continues to observe its 350th anniversary, I have had the opportunity to speak with Cher Nicholas. She is working on a book about the history of Hatfield. She mentioned the other day that it was revelatory when she re-read the legal and political documents associated with Hatfield’s incorporation in 1670 through the lens of the settlers’ faith.

The language was covenantal. They were struggling together to build God’s kingdom. John Robinson, the pastor to the Pilgrims, promised them as they embarked to the New World, “The Lord hath more light and truth yet to break forth from his holy Word.” When the Puritans came over in 1630, John Winthrop professed that the New World was going to be “A Modell of Christian Charity.” These people were escaping the limitations and prejudices of England. It was their faith that gave meaning and context to their hopes and energized their efforts.

Abigail Cooper is an assistant professor of history at Brandeis University. She writes about the slaves’ emancipation in exactly the same way. Reading their history, she realized that religion “was a way for the ex-slaves to discuss politics and society. It provided the language they used to define what it meant to be free men and women in America. ‘Most slaves would have described many of their struggles for power as religious, not political,’ Cooper writes in her dissertation. Through religion, the camps became ‘incubators of revolutionary revival’ and ‘sacred spaces of radical possibility.’”

(<https://www.brandeis.edu/magazine/2020/summer/featured-stories/freedom.html>)

Religion and faith provided the language and context of liberation and hope in both cases. The slaves’ story is a repetition of our founding story. It is a tragic and debilitating narrowness of conscience to be inspired by our story for 350 years and then not recognize nor appreciate the same in another’s.

I quoted this biblical passage last month and I would like to reinforce its message this month. At Mount Sinai, God commands: “You shall not oppress a resident alien. You know the heart of an alien for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.” (Exodus 23:9) This is the religious and moral obligation of empathy. Once established, the people of God have

a moral obligation to remember their past and not treat others as they had once been treated. God’s blessing of liberation must be played forward to honour and authenticate their own story.

The United States has too often failed this test of empathy. President Lincoln in his Second Inaugural Address in 1865 saw the Civil War as God’s true and righteous punishment for slavery, not only upon the slave states, but upon the states that tolerated slavery. When Lincoln was assassinated and Andrew Johnson assumed the Presidency, the war was won, but institutional racism was born and still lives.

The ideals of the Pilgrims and Puritans, the Founding Fathers and the Union are all tainted because they were not shared with Black Americans. When given the chance after Emancipation, the slaves turned to the same God and sacred texts to express the same dreams our nation has long espoused, but there was no empathy from the majority. We would not see Black subjugation in terms of our own story.

Black Americans have been telling white Americans that racism is real. All sorts of metrics prove that it is real, cell phone videos now show that it is real. This is our chance to believe them and stand with them. It is time to admit to and deal with our nation’s original sin. Slavery’s sin was that of the perpetrators and the tolerators. It’s the same with racism. When one suffers, we all suffer, says 1 Corinthians 12:26.

We need to cultivate the empathy that helps us to see others as part of our stories. When we do, we authenticate our story. We can still be “a city upon a hill” and a “Modell of Christian Charity,” but to do so we have to reach even further back. We need to remember the parting words of John Robinson that “The Lord hath more light and truth yet to break forth ...” The work of building God’s reign continues through us. We have no cause to be satisfied and to imagine that progress is complete. Our nation has inspiring ideals; we need to live toward them by sharing them as widely and fairly as possible. As followers of Jesus, we cannot remain silent. We are called to exercise our sacred duty to speak up, stand up, and show up for justice, so that we can create “sacred spaces of radical possibility.”

JULY EVENTS

Sat. 4 th	Independence Day.
Wed. 8 th	On-line monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees at 7:00pm.
Mon. 13 th	On-line <i>Exploring the Bible</i> study group from 7-8:00pm.
Thurs. 23 rd	On-line meeting of the Church Council at 7:00pm.
Mon. 27 th	On-line <i>Exploring the Bible</i> study group from 7-8:00pm.
Tue 28 th	On-line meeting of the Board of Deacons at 6:00pm.

REGULAR GATHERINGS (All in-person church gatherings are on hold until further notice.)

Sundays: Worship Service begins at 9:30am. Sunday School at 9:00am.

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 rehearses in the sanctuary at 6:30pm.

“ON-LINE”

We are not sure at this point when we will come together in person. As decisions are made, they will be emailed and posted so make sure and to check your emails and our website. In the meanwhile, we have been worshiping and meeting on-line. We live-stream our Services, meetings, Bible study, Sunday School, and Youth Group. Log-in information is sent to everyone on our church’s email mailing list. If you would like to be added to that list, please drop me an email at randyc1897@gmail.com. We are posting the recordings of our worship Service, but we do hope that people will join us live so that we may all gather just like on a regular Sunday, but in accordance with the constraints of these irregular times.

LIVE-STREAMED WORSHIP SERVICES UPDATE



We have been conducting our Sunday worship Services since March 15th in tandem with our sister congregation in Whately. Rev. Cynthia and I are working together on the Services, and Anthony has been adding his gift of music.

In keeping with our past practice, the Sunday worship Service in July and August will begin at 9:30am rather than the usual 10:00am. Please make a note of this change.

CHURCH FINANCES

Even though we are not able to meet in the church building, we continue as church. As such, we continue to need your financial assistance. We have already canceled several church fundraisers and we may have to cancel even more. If you attend these events, (1) please consider sending in a donation as if you were buying a ticket. Also, we are not passing the collection plate in person, but (2) please send in your church pledges and contributions regularly. Finally, most all of us have received stimulus checks from the government during this time of economic hardship. They are appreciated, I’m sure. However, if we are not in desperate need, (3) please consider sharing some of this largess with the church so that we may continue to minister as church. If you choose, you can dedicate your stimulus contribution to our Benevolence Fund, which supports ministries and those in

need outside of our congregation. Any of these contributions may be sent directly to Marty or to the church at 41 Main Street. Thank you for your continuing financial support.

VISITATIONS

I have been staying in regular contact with members who are homebound or who have difficulty in leaving their homes. Since we have not had the opportunity to see each other in person since mid-March, if anyone would like to speak with me, please feel free to give a call or drop an email. If we can practice social distancing, maybe we could meet outside of your homes with masks on. And hopefully, sooner rather than later, we will be able to gather in person again. In the meanwhile, let's keep being smart about our interactions and let's keep praying for the people working on a vaccine.

INDEPENDENCE DAY

This year's Fourth of July celebrations will be muted due to the continuing threat of the COVID-19 virus. Without the fireworks and picnics, maybe we can celebrate by remembering why we should celebrate. With this in mind, I share with you the poem *The New Colossus* by Emma Lazarus. These are the words inscribed on the base of the Statue of Liberty: "Not like conquering limbs astride from land to gates shall stand A mighty woman imprisoned lightning, and her name hand Glows world-wide welcome; her harbor that twin cities frame. "Keep, cries she With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"



the brazen giant of Greek fame, With land; Here at our sea-washed, sunset with a torch, whose flame Is the Mother of Exiles. From her beacond mild eyes command The air-bridged ancient lands, your storied pomp!"

EXPLORING THE BIBLE STUDY GROUP

The Massachusetts Bible Society's Executive Director Rev. Anne Robertson has authored a three-volume text called *Exploring the Bible*. We are reading Volume II on the Old Testament. If you would like to the Bible, I encourage you to join us everyone talks about but few read transforming lives for thousands of years. It continues to do so today if we give it the chance, and these stay-at-home days are the perfect chance.



reading Volume II on the Old become more comfortable with for Bible study. This book that has been informing and

Because of the pandemic, we will be meeting on-line. If you would like to join us from the comfort of your own home, please send me an email (randyc1897@gmail.com) and I will send you the log-in information. We would love to have you join us.

NEWS FROM THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The Board of Trustees has made the best of our absence from the church building. The dining room has been repainted and looks so much better. The granite steps leading into the church are being realigned and repaired. They will be leveled and sealed, and the handrails re-secured. A mason has repointed where necessary around the church's foundation and will complete his work once the front entrance work has been completed. After the front entrance work has been completed, the front lawn will be reseeded in late summer or early fall. A new handrail will be added at the side entrance off of Billings Way. The gutters along the north side of the church are being repaired and the drainage will be enhanced by the addition of a dry well. The Trustees, as mentioned above, are also looking into installing internet access at the church so that we may continue to share our worship Services live with those who are unable to be with us in person once we are able to gather once again.

We also appreciate the efforts of our Church Treasurer, Mark Gelotte, for following through with all of the paperwork needed to apply for a Payroll Protection Grant. It required two separate filings, but the church was granted \$11,917.00, which must be used to cover payroll costs. We have missed out on several important fundraisers so far due to the pandemic and this government grant is much needed and appreciated.

FOOD BANK VOLUNTEERS

Unfortunately, volunteering opportunities at the Food Bank have been put on hold until further notice due to the pandemic.

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.

HATFIELD'S 350TH

Due to the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 Steering Committee has made the difficult schedule as follows:



pandemic, the Hatfield 350th Anniversary decision to change their upcoming event

General Community Events

August 22nd – Summer Celebration

Rescheduled to **September 19th**, 12- 2:30pm – Historic Homes of Hatfield Walking Tour. This event is limited to 30 people. To register please email Cher Nicholas at CherNicholas@comcast.net.

October 10th – Annual Bonfire (Partnership w/ Firefighters Association)

December 19th – Luminarium/Fireworks (Partnership w/ Firefighters Association)

Rescheduled until Sunday, **May 30, 2021** – 350th Anniversary Parade beginning at 1PM.

Historical Events & Tours

Rescheduled to **September 19th** – Historic Homes of Hatfield Walking Tour

October 10th – Narrated Wagon Rides

May 30, 2021 – Incorporation Day and the Crossing of the CT River. Incorporation Day Celebration will go forward as a modified event.

Agricultural Events & Tours

Rescheduled until **July 23rd** – Farm to Table Dinner

Rescheduled to **August 22nd** as part of the Summer Celebration – Farm 5K Race

September 12th – Barn Mural Wagon Tour

Rescheduled to **October 3rd** - Cow Pie Bingo as part of the Tractor Parade and Harvest Festival

For the latest information, visit www.hatfield350.com or follow us on Facebook @Hatfield350th.

