

The Bell Tower

Newsletter of the First Congregational Church of Hatfield, UCC

2021

July

No. 7

Religious Freedom

Independence Day falls on a Sunday this year, which gives us the opportunity to celebrate the nation's 245th anniversary in our worship – or not. That right there, is the first right in our Bill of Rights. Freedom of religion forbids both the establishment of religion and also prohibits governmental interference in the exercise of religion. Religion is a choice, not the law, and that freedom is what makes religion meaningful.

Thomas Jefferson was the principal author of the Declaration of Independence. He is honoured in our



nation's Capital with a monument, and within that monument are engraved several of his most

prominent thoughts. This is one of them: "Almighty God hath created the mind free. All attempts to influence it by temporal punishments or burthens...are a departure from the plan of the holy Author of our religion...No man shall be compelled to frequent or support religious worship or ministry or shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief, but all men shall be free to profess and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion."

Jefferson was a religious free thinker. He was a man defined by the Enlightenment. He counted reason as God's greatest gift to humankind and thought of reason as the most trustworthy path to spiritual insight. For Jefferson a forced religion or belief was in all actuality a forgery. This was not an attack against religion. This was Jefferson's, and the nation's, trust that religion would be embraced and spread based on its merits.

From another perspective, the Constitution's First Amendment's first freedom is religion because religion can suppress all the other freedoms that follow. In Europe and in England, state-sponsored religion was the norm. If one's beliefs were different from those of the official church, the consequences could be severe. Many of America's first colonists settled here in search of religious freedom, but in most states, including Massachusetts, non-church members were denied the rights of full citizenship.

Even in religiously liberal Rhode Island, Jews were not allowed to vote. In the summer of 1790, President George Washington (with Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson) visited Rhode Island. At that time, religious representatives met with him, and many voiced their appreciation of his strenuous support of religious liberty.

One such group was the Hebrew Congregations of Newport. Washington sent them a formal letter after his visit. Profoundly, our first President offered these thoughts: "It is now no more that toleration is spoken of as if it were the indulgence of one class of people that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights, for, happily, the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens in giving it on all occasions their effectual support."

The Jewish minority was asking if they would be tolerated here as different, and Washington went further. Religious freedom was not a matter of toleration; it was Constitutional law. It defined who we are as a people. We would tolerate no religious bigotry nor religious persecution. Where once state and religion were hand in glove, in the United States of America there would be an intentional separation of religion and state for the benefit of them both.

Our freedom and democracy are protected by checks and balances. We have the three branches of the federal government that are equal and should act accordingly. We also have the free press which is an honourable institution that keeps government honest, and which is protected by the



First Amendment. Likewise, there is the freedom of speech and assembly in the First Amendment, which means the people are allowed to gather to protect our democracy. And I like to think of the free expression of religion as the nation's conscience, not beholden to government, not supported or sanctioned by government, but the voice that bravely speaks God's truth to power. This is why church and state are and should be separate.

JULY EVENTS

Sun. 4 th	Independence Day.
Mon. 5 th	Rev. Randy will attend the monthly online meeting of HEART (Hatfield Equity Alliance fighting against Racism Together) at 5:30pm.
Tue. 6 th	Online <i>Exploring the Bible</i> study group from 7-8:00pm.
Wed. 7 th	Online meeting of the Board of Deacons at 7:00pm.
Sun. 11 th	33 rd General Synod of the UCC will be conducted online through the 18 th .
Mon. 12 th	Online meeting of the Church Council at 7:00pm.
Sun. 18 th	Rev. Randy will be on vacation. The Board of Deacons will conduct the worship Service.
Mon. 26 th	Online <i>Exploring the Bible</i> study group from 7-8:00pm.

REGULAR GATHERINGS – Yoga and Choir are on hold for in-person gatherings until further notice.

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.

HUNGER DOESN'T TAKE THE SUMMER OFF FOOD DRIVE

School summer vacation has started. There are many young people who are helped greatly by the subsidized meal programs offered through the schools. This is why summer can be a time of food insecurity for many families. And this is why our congregation conducts the *Hunger Doesn't Take the Summer Off* food drive every year. Our collection is continuing through mid-August.

If you are able to help, the Northampton Area Survival Center is accepting non-perishable food items and toiletries, especially the kinds that are children friendly. We will load up our kiddie swimming pool each Sunday with your donations.

If you would prefer to help with a monetary donation, we will accept donations on behalf of the Western Mass Food Bank. Checks may be made payable to *FCC Hatfield* Benevolence Fund, with "food drive" written on the memo line.

We are planning to invite Andrew Morehouse, the Food Bank's Executive Director, to come and speak to the church on Sunday, August 15th about the good work they do serving just over 101,000 people monthly.

Thank you in advance for your generosity.

Hatfield Congregational Church Benevolence Committee

EXPLORING THE BIBLE ON-LINE STUDY GROUP

The Massachusetts Bible Society's past Executive Director, Rev. Anne Robertson, has authored 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. We are now reading from the New Testament. No prior Bible knowledge is needed, only a desire to become more familiar with the written Word of God.



VISITATIONS

As we make our way out of the pandemic, 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. I have been trying to stay in touch, but a phone call is not the same as seeing each other in person. 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.

YUP, ALREADY THINKING ABOUT THE FALL

The Church Council will meet on Monday the 12th. At that time, we will discuss our plans for Fall fundraisers. It is hoped that we will return to the chicken barbecue dinner in September, the roast pork dinner in October or November, and the Craft Fair in December. The last time these were conducted was 2019. These events are

mentioned already in the July newsletter because we are going to need your help. We will need people to be in charge of organizing the events and we will need volunteers to help work at them. Additionally, we are looking for new ideas for the Craft Fair this year. By August we may be making plans and we sure could use you.

SUMMERTIME

Summer offers many of us (except farmers) a time to slow down and relax. Many will take vacations during the summer. I, as a matter of fact, will be on vacation and not at our church on Sunday, July 18th. The Deacons will lead the Service that day and I know they will do a great job. I would like to mention that while I am on vacation, I will still attend Sunday worship. Church should not be looked upon as an obligation to be endured. I enjoy participating in worship and am uplifted by it. I hope it is the same for you. And I hope your summer schedule is relaxing and fun, and that worship will be a part of it too.



PRAYER SHAWL MINISTRY

The Conference has begun 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



them to the Conference to be shared with communities and others. One of our 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. Due to the fact that fewer of us are attending church in person during the pandemic, our sales of these gift cards have declined. Linda makes it as easy as possible to pick-up the cards at her home. Give her a call to arrange a day and time; Linda places them in her mailbox; you leave your payment there; and it's all done. Please contact Linda M. if you can help with this church fundraiser. 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.



HAPPY FOURTH OF JULY