



The Voice Newsletter

of FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

A Pilgrim Church for a Pilgrim People

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PASTOR'S PASSAGE

It is difficult to believe that it has been a year since we have had to address the needs of the church for health reasons and eventually, stop meeting together to keep our members and friends safe. As Pastors, we believed that if people followed the instructions of wearing masks, staying at home as much as possible, washing hands and social distancing, that it would be a short time until the tide changed. Obviously, that hasn't happened and we have had to push the date of re-opening further and further away.

Yes, we are all discouraged. We have watched huge gatherings of people meet without masks, people gathering for holidays in spite of dire warnings, and some who simply are tired and want the world to return to time before COVID by pretending it doesn't exist. But that is not possible and we realize that our way of living is going to be changed for months and years to come.

So, what do we do? We are followers of Christ. Those early followers often had to hide their identities, meet in small groups, use signs and rituals to identify one another and do the work of Jesus. They fed the poor, they found lodging for the homeless, they cared for widows and prisoners, they simply adapted. Certainly, if those early followers could continue to pass the lessons of Jesus on to those around them, we can do the same!

So, I encourage you to have faith. I challenge you to find creative ways to share Jesus' teachings and message as you interact with people, whether in person or on-line through your various media sources. Call those who do not have computers or send notes. How long has it been since you received a hand-written note in the mail? Remember your delight? Think of all those who have been quarantined in retirement centers or nursing homes or even in their own homes with few outlets for fellowship. What love they would experience when receiving a note of encouragement or know they are missed.

I believe God will get us through this time of turmoil, whether with a health crisis or national crisis. We walk with God. We pray and await his words of wisdom, guiding us to do the work of Jesus in spite of troubling times. So, this past week, our Church Council voted to re-open our Church to the public for worship on Sunday, March 7. I have indicated the safety protocol we will use in the next article. We will finally be together again as a family!! Let's truly be a Pilgrim People who step out and lead the world with our lives, our words and our prayers.

As always, I encourage you to.....BE THE CHURCH!

My Love and Blessings,

Joy

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

I would like to share some insights on human behavior:

Big Picture: Complain less and compliment more!

Humans are seldom without a complaint of some kind. This condition is documented throughout time as shown when the Israelites freed from slavery in Egypt complained to Moses about the conditions of their



wandering toward their new homeland. Moses goes up to the mountain and what do the people do? Turn back to idols. They complained that God had deserted them, yet they were on their pilgrimage journey to their new homeland.

Many people are never at a loss to complain about something- the weather, their sports team, their neighbors, and the list goes on. If one has to wait in a drive up restaurant more than four minutes, some people ask to speak with the manager. Complaining seems to be the norm for many people who never seem satisfied.

Our lifestyle is the easiest in human history. We have so much and really have so little to complain about. In many areas of the world, people face almost insurmountable problems and yet they do their best without complaint. Do we have a right to expect perfection- a life with no difficulties? I think not.

I advocate complaining less and complimenting more. It is amazing how people respond to compliments. How do you feel when you get one? Compliments can lay the foundation for future growth in relationships and can validate the work that a person does. Leo Bascaglia shares this insightful quote on compliments: "Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around."

Big Picture: Live by more we than I!

When Jesus was asked "Who is the greatest?" Jesus replied "To be the greatest is to be a servant". The message is clear that we should live by a "mission mentality" in which we help others. In American society however, the message that surrounds us is to be rich, live however you would like,

and to worry only about yourself. We are living in an increasingly secular society which precludes the sharing of Christian virtues like empathy and servanthood. Children are not playing video games in which the winner is the person who gives away the most money, or has volunteered the most hours to a needy cause. The winner is the one who zapped the most of the enemy and reward of being #1.

The concept of “we” has much to overcome – the natural human impulse of being selfish and noting the importance of self. From road rage to an increase in family troubles, they can be traced back to the concept of “I”: When I drive, it is my road so get out of the way! In the family unit, I need to get what I want. Implicit is a lack of respect for others and a sense of personal entitlement.

Those who live in the “we” are the people who reach out to make a difference in lives. It starts with the family, then to co-workers, friends, and strangers. There is no question that we feel the best about ourselves when we are helping someone else. It is sort of like understanding that at Christmas time, we derive more pleasure in seeing someone open a gift that we purchased for him/her, as opposed to opening a present for them.

May we endeavor to be the greatest, by being a “We” person, a servant to others! Gene



DONNA'S DELIBERATIONS

Dear Church Family,

The Council met January 20 via zoom which is on the internet for video conferencing. I send the Council members a link address and on the appointed date and time, each person in the safety of their home can click onto the link on their computer. We can then see each other and talk for our meeting. We were using the basic zoom plan, which is a free use of zoom but for 40 minutes and only three or more people. I am now a zoom host, which means I'm licensed to hold zoom meetings that could include 100 people over 24 hours. Why we'd want to meet that long with that many people is up for your imagination. However, having the time to actually discuss things in our meeting without feeling rushed is very helpful.

For the Council meeting, we reviewed 2020's accomplishments, member demographics, future ideas and tasks for 2021 and Treasurer's Charles 2020-year end financial conclusion with future needs. Pastor Joy described the many methods of ministry used to keep in touch with members and others during this pandemic. We now hope to open March 7 for church while still using masks, handwashing, and distancing. We will keep you informed regarding those plans. Hopefully more folks will be vaccinated as soon as they are able against COVID.

Pastor Gene compiled a list of building and grounds work that had been completed in 2020 and also future needs which includes estimated costs. We will be putting a Wish List page on the website for those interested and for donors needing a tax break and/or feeling lead to make contributions towards some project.

Remember, the Council minutes are always available to review in the church office's computer. Meanwhile, we continue to organize, review items, clean spaces in preparation for when we can use them again.

My Thoughts

The last couple of months has added concerns of an increase in violence, division, and hate, all of which are NOT characteristics of a Christian. No matter our political persuasions, as Christians we cannot condone hate or groups that encourage hate especially amongst ourselves. Now is a good time as any to reflect on our own words and behaviors. Do they actually mimic Jesus's life? As a Christian, how does one deal with angry, hateful folks especially when hate seems flourishing in our world?

Daryl Johnson is a former analyst at a branch of the Department of Homeland Security has this to say about HATE Groups:

"If you've got family members, neighbors, co-workers that are part of these movements, rather than ostracize and debate and criticize and isolate them, we need to love them, have compassion and bring them into the mainstream. The only way you're going to get rid of hate is through love. Every person I've ever known about that's been a white supremacist has left the movement through an act of compassion or love. They didn't leave it because someone convinced them that their belief systems were wrong." Doesn't that sound like something Jesus did using compassion and love? Didn't He teach us to do this a long time ago?

As a Christian, the life of Jesus is our true example for how we treat each other. Jesus's life was all about love, forgiveness, helping the vulnerable, and giving hope. It may sound very Pollyannaish, but if

you study His life that was His message. He asked us to do the same. These are Jesus' words, "But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you Do to others as you would have them do to you...But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:27-28; 35-36, NIV).

Then there are these words to live by. "We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister" (1 John 4:19-21, NIV). This isn't just talking about our biological brothers and sisters, but all of us since we are all God's children.

There you have it! Just a few simple things to keep in mind when you say you are a Christian—a Christ follower. Being a Christian is about showing Jesus' love for everyone! If you find your words, behavior, ideas are not about love, then ask Jesus to realign you to His example. I have to do that every day. I hope you do too.

Your sister in Christ,
Donna
donnadoc@hotmail.com



MUSIC NOTES FROM MAX

ABOUT MUSIC

As we ease towards in-person worship services, we are enjoying the musical contributions of our cherished friends. Cheryl Kitto and Kay and Kendell Nordstrom have volunteered to form the nucleus of a post-Covid choir for the last several Sundays, and they are motivated to continue in sharing their talents. Repopulating our choir loft again will be a building process.



This past Sunday, January 24, we enjoyed the superb artistry of one of our favorite daughters, Hannah E. Tobias, flute. A frequent visitor in our music ministry, Hannah is auditioning for study in the top graduate schools, having graduated with honors from the music conservatory of Lawrence University in Appleton. We remember enjoying her music in coordination with Cheryl as vocalist in the moving service on Christmas Eve, 2020.

We continue in the cautious mode as far as the concerts we offer the community in the MUSICA MAXIMA series. As you know, several concerts which had been announced have been cancelled or postponed. As we march forward, the next program, which is scheduled for Sunday, February 21, 3 pm, will be live-stream only. Featured on the program are several members of the Wisconsin Baroque Ensemble (WBE), one being myself. WBE, a group of superb musicians in the early-music field with normally an active performance schedule in Madison, Milwaukee, Beloit College, and other cities and campuses, has been quite silent this year as we have remained home in quarantine. The main feature of February's program will be baroque cellists, Charlie Rasmussen (who has been a guest in our services and concerts) and Anton TenWolde,

presenting music of their recent highly-reviewed CD of cello duets of Tommaso Giordani (late 18th century). By contrast, with myself at the harpsichord, Eric Miller will perform on the viola da gamba music of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (successful son of the more famous J. S. Bach). We will be publicizing this event quite widely; it will make interesting listening in your remote stations at home.

We can look forward to Sunday, March 7, when pianist Johanna Baldwin will again elevate our service with gospel-like arrangements of favorite hymns. Moving further, Easter Sunday is April 4, for which my neighbor, Professor Paul Stanley, assures me that he, at my urging, is practicing to be our trumpeter on that festival morning. It will be good for us all to be together as our music resounds from the rafters of First Congregational Church's meeting room.

YOUR FAITHFUL SERVANT, Max



MISSION OF THE MONTH

MINISTER'S DISCRETIONARY FUND

There are times when members or friends from the community come to the Church with an immediate need that cannot be met in a timely manner by another community mission. This fund allows your Pastors to be able to carefully check credentials, vet the need and supply funds for things such as phone or electric bills, baby formula, transportation or sometimes even work boots or tools. We try to refer people to local agencies, but sometimes the red tape is impossible to overcome when time is of the essence. We ask that you be generous so that we can continue to serve the needy. Every penny of this money is accounted for and we ask for identification to prevent abuse of the fund.

RE-OPENING THE CHURCH TO THE PUBLIC

The Church Council met on Wednesday, January 20 and discussed opening the Church for worship on Sundays. *Right now, we have set a tentative date of March 7, the first Sunday in March*, unless the health department indicates a drastic increase in disease in our area. We are planning to open with the same guidelines of wearing masks, social distancing and special music by soloists and musicians rather than congregational singing. We can't wait to be with you again.



Prayer for the Church

Loving and Eternal God, you have abundantly blessed us with the power to reach out and make a difference in the world. We ask that you bless our ministry through our Church and increase our love for one another and our community. Help us honor our history and seek your will as we march into our future in Jesus' name. Amen.

The Soul of Christianity

A Christ-centered life does not mean a life in which one sings hymns, reads Scripture and edifies his neighbors by hanging texts on the walls. One does not become a Christian by doing a good deed a day, nor by go-getting for religion, nor by engaging in economic and political reform movements, even though these things are done from the noblest of human motives. A Christian is one who, believing that Christ is the Son of God, has that Christ-life in his soul. –Fulton Sheen

Calendar

- February 7 Worship, 10am Streaming online
The Rev. Gene Van Galder, preaching
- February 14 Worship, 10am Streaming online
The Rev. Joy A Baumgartner, preaching
- February 17 Ash Wednesday
- February 21 Worship, 10am Streaming online
The Rev. Gene Van Galder, preaching
MUSICA MAXIMA 3pm
Live stream only
- February 28 Worship, 10am Streaming online
The Rev. Joy A Baumgartner, preaching

FEBRUARY



Birthdays

- February 2 Douglas Kelley
- February 9 Sherry Blakely
- February 16 Pat Mc Cleary
- February 22 Shelly Dyreson
- February 23 Carol Glenn
- February 29 Phyllis Farnum

Anniversaries

- February 5 Don and Hellen Bifano
- February 14 Dale and Carol Glenn
- February 27 Mike and Shelly Dyreson



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We are especially Thankful for: