

TOWER NOTES

Centre Congregational Church (United Church of Christ)

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The Rev. Nancy Rottman, Pastor

The Rev. Mark Freeman Strickland, Pastor Emeritus

Laraine Wilson, Director of Faith Formation

Douglas W. Hodgkins, Organist/Choir Director

Leah O'Brien, Director of Tower Day School

Susan Spear & Barbara Langill, Secretaries

We Welcome Everyone: An "Open and Affirming" Church

June 2020

Together Apart – An Update

My dear friends in Christ, I know that you are aware of all of the hype that has surrounded the "opening" of our churches here in Massachusetts and around the country as our governors have been putting into place their phased plans for re-opening. Churches are now allowed to gather here in Massachusetts but there are strict limits and protocols that must be adhered to in order to do so. Denominational leadership from all of the mainline protestant churches, including the Southern New England Conference of the UCC, have discouraged gathering in person at a minimum until July 1st and most through the entire summer because the virus remains prevalent and virulent. The protocols seriously limit the scope of our worship experience, and the most vulnerable population is still encouraged to stay home. But beyond the logistics, here is the thing that is missed when we talk about church in this way...the church is not a building! Centre Church is not the human-made edifice at 5 Summer Street – as loved and cared for as our building is. Centre Church, all churches, have not been closed. In fact, Centre Church has been open for 300 years and counting. We have just changed the address of where and how we worship for the time being.

While we would love to be able to gather again, after reviewing all the protocols and recommendations it is the judgment of Parish Council and myself that it would be premature for Centre Church to begin gathering immediately. The church has always been and should continue to be a place of healing and not harm. Therefore, we plan to continue virtual worship through the

summer months. This will give us time to assess how and when we can begin to gather safely in our church building and to put the safety precautions that prove to be the most efficacious. And as we welcome the summer months, we invite you to stay tuned to Tower Notes and the weekly email newsletter for more information on the fun we are planning for Holy Communion in July and August.

In the meantime, Susan, Barbara and I have returned to the office while practicing physical distancing and wearing masks. Susan or Barbara will be in the office Monday through Friday from 9 am to 12 pm. I will be in the office at least a portion of most weekdays as my schedule allows. The building will remain locked and you are encouraged to reach out by phone, email, or snail mail for most business, but should you need to come by the office for any reason, please call first (781)334-3050. To enter the building, you will need a mask and will be asked to wash hands or don gloves upon entering. Thank you for your attention to these measures that are an act of Christian love for our staff, for Jeff Law and Jim Marshall as they continue to attend to essential financial matters for the church, and for our Lights Out champions, Chuck, Scott, and Bruce!

I know this is hard. I know it is disappointing. I miss you all! You all miss each other! But the most loving thing we can do is to take care of each other by continuing to be church together virtually...for now.

With love and care,

Rev. Nancy

News from Around the Parish

Love Notes for Karen

It is with great joy and thanksgiving that we share the news that Karen Nascembeni has left Spaulding Rehab and is continuing her recovery in the loving care of her sister, Sandra who shared, "On behalf of the entire Nascembeni and Richard families including Karen, AnnaMaria and Rusty, Gina and Glenn, Doreen and David, Glenn and my husband Bill and myself, thank you for your love and support over the last nine weeks." Cards and notes of love and encouragement may be sent to: Karen Nascembeni
c/o The McArthur Family
14 Jefferson Street
Haverhill, MA 01830

From Marian Orfeo

My deepest gratitude goes out to my Centre Church friends who have brightened my days with cards, calls, visits and goodies. Your support during my treatment really lifts my spirits.

Our love and prayers are extended to Sue Gustavsen upon the May 2nd death of her beloved sister, Carolyn Joy Terenzoni, who will be remembered as a fine Christian woman with a strong faith who touched the lives of many people.

We are deeply saddened to learn of the death of Rev. Marilyn Rossier on May 12. She was Associate Pastor at Centre Church from 1985 through 1993.

Our love and sympathy are extended to Denise Weaver upon the death of her sister, Janis Christina on May 15. Due to the current health crisis, a Celebration of Janis' life will be held at a later date.

Our love and sympathy are extended to the family and friends of Gladys Carter who died on May 23 from complications of the COVID-19 virus. A Celebration of Gladys' life will be held when public events resume.

Congratulations to Barbara Becker's grandson Michael Bruce, USMC who was recently promoted to Major. He and his wife, Valerie will be leaving soon for Stuttgart, Germany. They will be stationed there for 3 years.

Mission and Outreach

Since many local organizations are struggling due to the Covid-19 crisis, and since making meals and volunteering as we usually do is difficult, the Outreach Ministry Team has decided to distribute some of our "300th Anniversary Gift Funds" now by:

1. Sending \$300/month to Haven From Hunger and Bread & Roses starting in May and continuing through 2020 at least.
2. Matching any donations our congregation makes to Covid response aid as of April. Just send your receipt to the church office.

Checks to the organizations below were written on May 15th as part of this campaign to match donations.

Chelsea Collaborative, Inc.	\$369.00
PROJECT BREAD	\$280.00
Bread & Roses	\$204.81
My Brother's Table	\$200.00
Citizens Inn	\$175.00
Massachusetts General Hospital	\$100.00
	\$1,328.81

Green Team

Frank Scott, Chuck Cotting, Rev. Nancy and Linda Ladd have been reading the book "Cathedral on Fire" and joining some online discussions on it led by the UCC at ucc.org/cathedral_on_fire_book_discussion. We plan to share what we've learned with the whole congregation by running a Centre Church version of this book group later in 2020.



Parish Council Minutes

The April 27, 2020 minutes from Parish Council are available online at

<http://www.centre-church.org/Council>. If you would like a copy, please contact the church office and we will mail one out to you.

Stewardship Update

We have received 65 pledges since Commitment Sunday at the end of February, which feels like a lifetime ago. Our fiscal year is quickly coming to a close and there are approximately 17 pledges still outstanding – people who pledged last year, but have not done so yet this year. We understand that these are challenging and uncertain times, but we hope that if you are able to pledge, you will return your pledge card as soon as possible. Amidst the uncertainty, accurate pledge data is essential for developing the FY 2021 budget.

Our building may be closed, but our church is still OPEN! Our staff is working hard to provide Sunday morning worship and coffee hour via YouTube and Zoom. They are also leading mid-week discussion and prayer groups for adults as well as programs for children and youth. We aren't able to make meals for Bread and Roses or volunteer at Haven From Hunger, but we continue to support those organizations and others with financial contributions. The work of the church continues despite the pandemic. We encourage everyone who can to please return your pledge card and continue supporting the ministry of Centre Church. If you need a pledge card, please call the church office and one will be mailed to you.

Holiday Fair 2020

In an abundance of caution, we have decided to cancel our Centre Church Holiday Fair scheduled for November 7, 2020. We are disappointed that we need to cancel, but we know that we cannot enforce the social distancing that will likely continue to be required for large groups to gather in November. Many of our crafters are reluctant to commit to participating given the uncertainty of Covid-19. We want our fair to be safe and enjoyable for everyone – church volunteers, crafters, and customers. That just doesn't seem possible this year.

So, we are looking ahead! We plan to hold the fair in 2021. Save the Date: November 6, 2021!



Faith Formation Ministry Updates

Celebration Sunday June 7: Parents, Children, Youth, Faith Formation and Mission and Outreach are teaming up to put together a Celebration Sunday focused on Creation Care and featuring prayers, readings and songs that connect us to the Earth that we have been called to care for. Thank you to all of the families who have volunteered to make signs, take pictures with their animals and do readings.

Parent Support Group: Thursdays at 7:30 pm

Jill and/or Larainne will lead a virtual support group for parents of school-aged children. Join us to build your circle of support through the Covid Crisis and beyond. Contact Larainne for the link.

Under The Tent: Sundays at 4 p.m. (excluding June 7th)

Children up to Grade 4 are invited to join Larainne "Under The Tent" -- make a fort, tent or other cozy space in your living room or wherever you'd like and join in for a check-in, story and discussion on Sunday afternoons. We've had four so far and they've been great! We've seen the Crosbie, The DiGiorgio, The Barbieri, The Wilson, The Biggar and The Gaskins Families. Contact Larainne for the link.

Youth Group: Select Sundays at 5 p.m.: Next one 6/7/2020

Middle School and High School Youth - Join Larainne on her back deck (weather permitting). Youth can be comfortable and casual inside or outside as we gather to share stories, play virtual games and "see" one another again! Contact Larainne for the link!

Faith Formation Ministry Team Meeting:

June 16th at 7:30 p.m.: Summer Programming

A Congregational Letter from Church Moderator, Bruce Weaver

June 1, 2020

Hello Friends,

I am writing to give you brief update on unusual Parish Council decisions that have occurred since the COVID-19 pandemic arrived in our everyday lives almost 3 months ago. They have been carefully discussed and unanimously agreed upon.

Suspension of Sanctuary / Chapel Services until September 2020

Although the Massachusetts guidelines now allow places of worship to reopen, there are still many issues that make this very difficult to do. Because of social distancing requirements, we would need to remain in the non-air-conditioned sanctuary. We would have to refrain from singing as this activity has been proven to increase the possible transmission of the virus. We would need to have an entrance and exit plan in place. Everyone, including Rev. Nancy, would need to wear a mask. These are just a few of the challenges we face if we were to reopen. As much as everyone is looking forward in worshipping together in our building, the health risk remains present. We have decided to opt on the side of safety and will continue to provide our services of worship remotely for the next few months. Please watch for further information from Rev. Nancy on how worship will take place as we head into the summer months.

Payroll Protection Program

Several weeks ago, the Federal Government passed an economic stimulus package to help both individuals and businesses cope with the financial losses that were occurring from the pandemic. The package also allowed churches and other individuals / organizations that were typically exempt to be considered eligible for government loan assistance. Parish Council and the Tower Day School Board of Directors agreed to instruct the church treasurer to apply for this loan assistance. The need was based on the Tower Day salaries and the loss of tuition payments that Tower would incur with the school shutdown.

The application was made and awarded for the sum of \$113,000.00. This amount will allow us to continue salary payments to all staff and teachers through the end of August. Also, as part of the loan agreement, when the church presents documentation to show that the loan was used for payroll and other operating expenses, the loan will be forgiven and granted to the church.

Centre Church – 300 Years

About 1 year ago we had our first meeting to discuss how we wanted to celebrate our 300th anniversary. Several great ideas were discussed, some events were scheduled and planning began to happen. We now find ourselves in a situation that no one could have imagined possible. Therefore, considering all the uncertainty that we all are living with, we have decided to place some of these plans on hold for at least a year. We anticipate celebrating these joyful anniversary events at a later date.

Our Fiscal Year Ends on June 30th

There is a protocol that we follow each spring as we prepare to close the fiscal year. First, we remind the congregation that remaining yearly pledges need to be made by the end of June. We are still sending this reminder, and at the same time, we understand that this pandemic has had a major impact upon our economy in a way that may prevent you from fulfilling your annual pledge. If possible, please notify Jim Marshall at northput49@comcast.net if you find yourself in this situation.

Second, the church accounting system must have a new fiscal budget in place so that all revenue and expense transactions occurring after June 30 have revised category balances to keep the books in order. This is done by creating a temporary budget in June that becomes revised and finalized once all the prior year end reconciliations are complete. Our bylaws require that budget approval is done at the Annual Meeting or by a special meeting of the congregation. During this time, it is very difficult to hold such a meeting. With a unanimous vote at the May Parish Council meeting, it was agreed upon that the 2020 – 2021 temporary budget will be approved by Parish Council with only the final budget being approved by the congregation at the Annual Meeting later this fall. It was also agreed to apply this to the extension of terms of the church officers and team leaders.

Friends, we find ourselves in a situation that none of us could have imagined. As Moderator, I feel that these decisions have been made in the best interest of the congregation and church. If you wish to discuss anything I can be reached at 781-334-4341 or bcweaver@verizon.net. Reverend Nancy and/or other Parish Council member are also readily available to discuss your concerns or thoughts.

Best Wishes for a Healthy Summer!

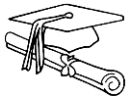
Bruce C. Weaver
Moderator



While our building might be closed, our church has been open for 300 years and counting!

Centre Church Virtual Gathering Schedule

- **Sunday Morning** worship video – Premieres on our YouTube Channel at 10 am each Sunday morning. Subscribe to our channel and set reminders at www.youtube.com/c/centrecongregationalchurch/
- Zoom Fellowship hour: **Sundays at 11am**
- Under The Tent: **Sundays at 4pm** – gathering for children with Ms. Larainne.
- Youth Group: Select **Sundays at 5pm**
- Midweek Prayer and Support Gathering: **Wednesdays at 4pm** - with Rev.Nancy.
- Adult Discussion Group: **Thursdays at 3 pm** - with Rev. Nancy.
- Parent Support Group: **Thursdays at 7pm** - with Ms. Larainne and/or Jill DiGiorgio

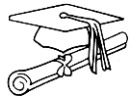


Congratulations to the Centre Church Members of the Class of 2020

High School Graduates

Harlee Priestly is a student at Lynnfield High School. She has taken dance lessons since she was 3 years old, is a beautiful dancer and is currently an assistant teacher at Vibes Dance Center. She has been doing that for 2 years. She was a varsity cheerleader at LHS for 4 years, is a lover of animals and our earth. She is attending UMASS Amherst in the fall. Harlee plans to study Botany and Nutrition. She hopes one day to own a dancing school with a nutrition program for children and parents.

Daniel Miller is a student at Essex North Shore Agricultural & Technical School. His field of study is Environmental Science. He is finishing up his senior Research project on Sand Dune Erosion. Graduation is scheduled for 8/1/20 Daniel will be attending University of New Hampshire in the fall majoring in Environmental Science. He has been active in the Boy Scouts for many years and achieved the Rank of Eagle Scout on 2/13/20. He enjoys surfing, landscaping and skiing.



College Graduations

Abbie Weaver graduated on May 8th from UMass Amherst, Isenberg School of Management with a Bachelor of Science in Sport Management and a Bachelor of Business in Marketing.

Leigh Chamberlain Clafin graduated from Babson College with honors on May 6th 2020 with a Bachelor's of Science, Cum Laude. She is working for Open Gov in the Seaport area in Boston

Hayley Timmons recently graduated from Cornell's College of Human Ecology with a Bachelor's of Science in Policy Analysis and Management. She is now pursuing her Master's Degree at Cornell.

Kelly Look graduated from UMass Amherst, Isenberg School of Management with a Bachelor of Business Administration.

Rebecca Sievers graduated on May 16th from San Diego State University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Kinesiology, Pre Physical Therapy.