



COVENANT NEWS

The Newsletter of the First Congregational Church of Webster Groves

FROM THE PASTOR

Century of Progress

How long, O LORD? ... How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long? ... But I trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to [you], because [you have] dealt bountifully with me.

(Psalm 13:1a, 2a, 5-6)

Considering the Covid-19 pandemic has led me to the church archives more than once, in the last many weeks. By now, you are familiar with the influenza pandemic which began in the United States but somehow was labeled, “Spanish Flu.” It struck the St. Louis area in the fall of 1918, and the Board of Health demanded that all public gatherings cease for a period of six weeks. Our own worship services were suspended, from October 13 until November 17.

Prior to October 13 we were meeting at 11:00am and 4:00pm, for worship and Christian Education. On November 24, there was one service allowed as part of a phased reopening – the morning session. Sunday School remained out of session until Webster Groves schools reopened in December. A second wave of infection struck in February 1919, but our church’s gatherings were not suspended. From church records, it appears that only three of our perhaps 500 constituents at the time died with influenza, and one of these three was an 8-year-old girl at our South Webster Sunday School and chapel.

I have wondered, as I have been reading the historic documents, whether our forebears should have been more vigilant in their response to that virus. But the world at that time was witnessing the ending of the Great War, desperate to put misery behind. You can’t fault people for wanting life again as it was.

I hear from many of you about your own coronavirus-induced Spring Fever. However, none of us is of a spiritual disposition to believe that risking others’ health is worth us feeling “back to normal” again. As I will indicate in my last sermon for the month of June, we mustn’t go back to the way things were, and what will be, in all likelihood, will be better for all of us.

Enduring this middle time is the hardest part, filled with anxieties, but we are also learning new and more responsible ways to be.

Let us be confident that what is becoming is worth our endurance and patience. By God’s grace we persevere.

Peace.

PASTOR DAVE DENSON

JUNE 2020

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WORSHIP NOTES FOR MAY

This schedule is subject to change, as need may arise.

Worship services on Sundays at 10:00 am are interactive on Zoom and streamed on our YouTube channel (www.bit.ly/FCCWG-YT).

An edited version of the worship service may be streamed from YouTube, a few hours later.

A virtual Coffee Fellowship follows worship on Zoom.

To participate with Zoom, install the Zoom app on your favorite internet-connected device, then go to <http://bit.ly/JehovahJava> (Be sure to capitalize the Js!).

Or call 1 312 626 6799, and enter Meeting ID 975 1194 9295.

SUNDAY, JUNE 7, 10:00 AM — *Feast of the Trinity; Virtual Communion.* **Scriptures:** Psalm 8; Matthew 28:16-20. Create a place-setting for yourself of bread and wine, juice, or water, to partake with others as “virtual communion.” (Technically, we can’t call it *communion* if we’re not all in the same place and sharing the same blessed elements; but we can approximate it as we call to mind the Christ’s last supper.) During this worship service, we will celebrate the theology that sets Christians apart from other religions – the Triune God.

Something that sets our tradition apart from many other Christians is our reliance not only on the authority of scripture, but on the authority of advanced scientific knowledge and human progress. We are imagining with God how we as Christians and as a church may be fittingly together and useful to our Sovereign’s purposes. This month, continuing from his Pentecost message (“Phase 1”), the Pastor will be using the knowledge and advice of our Restart Committee and the leadership of the Wider Church, to present a series of morning messages resonant with our historic moment and designed to strengthen our community, work, and witness.

The second phase in a plan created by Conference Minister Ginny Brown-Daniel gathers no more than ten people at a time but emphasizes the importance of making safe the spaces where those few gather. In an atmosphere of virtual communion, Pastor Dave Denoon bears in mind the meaningful Tri-unity of God and Jesus’ insistence that his Spirit is “wherever two or three are gathered together” in his Trinity **Message of the Day: “Phase 2: Restoration of Space”**

SUNDAY, JUNE 14, 10:00 AM — *Second Sunday after Pentecost.* **Scripture:** Genesis 18:1-15 and 21:1-7; Romans 5:1-8. The third phase of the Missouri Mid-South Conference’s five-phase restoration program begins after eight weeks of decline in local coronavirus infection. The plan presents an opportunity for as many as 25 people at a time to be together on church grounds. For worship and other activities this would mean that people’s onsite presence would be by reservation only and very closely monitored. What will we need to consider about the meaning of *being Church* so that we can make such restricted togetherness meaningful? **Message of the Day: “Phase 3: Restoration of Meaningful Community”**

SUNDAY, JUNE 21, 10:00 AM — *Third Sunday after Pentecost; Fathers Day.* **Scriptures:** Genesis 21:8-21; Psalm 86:1-10, 16-17. With these readings, one might think to title one’s sermon, “Call Me Ishmael.” When we recognize and celebrate our irreversible and profound connection with God, and our spirited connection with one another, we still only begin to fathom the blessings possible. The MMSC phased reopening plan includes a fourth phase with 50 people gathering at a time and some strongly cautioned steps toward sharing food and gathering small groups. If singing is allowed at all, the singers are masked (not as in the TV show... OK, maybe as in the TV show), and some of the trappings of our communal life begin to reappear, but most importantly we remind ourselves that this skeletal existence is faithful to our central understanding: We have been blessed so that we may bless others. **Message of the Day: “Phase 4: Restoration of Spirited Life”**

SUNDAY, JUNE 28, 10:00 AM — *Fourth Sunday after Pentecost; Pride Weekend.* **Scriptures:** Genesis 22:1-14; Psalm 13; Romans 6:12-23; Matthew 10:40-42. All of the phases of restoration in the wake of the current pandemic can be interrupted by a renewed outbreak and a rise in cases of infection. The last step presumes that a vaccine has been found and is generally available to the public. At this point, however, we will inevitably discover the irony of our governing term, “restoration.” There will be nothing about our life as a community left unaffected by the intrusion of this virus upon our lives. For Pride Weekend, as we rejoice in our embodied creation, we will reflect on the ways in which returning to our former ways and presuming the privilege to do so in fact prevents us from becoming the people, the community, the Church that the Spirit is drawing us to become. We cannot go back, but neither should we want to. **Message of the Day: “Phase 5: Restoration as a Moving Target.”**

MODERATOR'S CORNER JUNE 2020

As we enter another month dealing with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the question remains as to when we can reopen the church for worship and activities. The previous target dates of May 17 and June 1 were not feasible given the status of the pandemic and the governmental restrictions in place. There is no desire to open until guidelines are in place to reduce the risk to our congregation, staff, and to other users of the church facilities. Our church is tasked with making decisions that are in the best interest of all parties involved while being compliant with local, state and national guidelines. The Executive Ministry has formed a **Restart Committee** to examine these issues and make decisions regarding the reopening of the church facility for scheduled activities.

The first meeting was held May 13 during which time it was determined that the church needs to follow the current County rules regarding reopening the church facility for all activities including our worship services. This means activities will be phased in using the St. Louis County Covid-19 Guidelines and the suggested phase reopening document published by the Missouri Mid-South Conference United Church of Christ. The Committee will also look at the plan being developed by the Webster Groves School District for regulating programs involving youth. The Restart Committee is made up of church members representing church leadership (**Mark Edwards**, Moderator and **Linda Kopetti**, Past Moderator), church staff (**Rev. David Denoon**, Pastor and **Chip Isringhaus**, Facility Manager) and two medical professionals trained in the area of epidemiology (**Dr. Doug Miller**) and immunology (**Dr. Lynda Morrison**). This group will develop a plan for building use and for how we can worship together while minimizing the risk of contamination. It might mean incorporating different formats and space usage for our worship, but it will let us come together physically as a congregation.

In the meantime, the business of being a church continues as:

1. discussion takes place on how we can have an all church meeting and present a proposed slate of new church officers.
2. starting the search for staff members needed for the revised Christian Education program approved by the Executive Ministry in April.
3. examination by the Strategic Planning Committee of our Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) with the guidance of Sue Leary, a church member and former pastor.
4. the securing of a loan under the federal Payroll Protection Program (PPP) by our Treasurer, Jenny Jones with the possibility of “forgiveness” under the Federal Care Act put in place because of the COVID-19 crisis.
5. Hard work by our staff in the production of a meaningful online worship service each Sunday during the shut down.

These are a few of the actions taking place at First Church, but the most important element of our church is you. Please continue to be engaged in what we are doing. Support each other and your church as we work through this “historical first”. We are enduring a lot, but we are also learning a lot about who we are as a church. We are learning things that will certainly strengthen our faith experience. Stay safe, stay healthy, and stay connected....**BE THE CHURCH.**

Together in Christ,

Mark Edwards
Moderator

FROM THE ORGANIST'S BENCH



And the search continues...

In these Covid-19 times a musician is acutely aware that music making is a community event. It is difficult to rehearse and perform in community when we must be apart. Most of my friends who are church musicians and ensemble musicians are searching for the Holy Grail: any application that will connect people making music in real time with no delays or drop-outs.

I know that many high school musicians who received top scores at local solo/ensemble festival (at Parkway Central) could not compete at the State Festival at Columbia last month. Even with my orchestra, the University City Symphony, we are trying to plan a season but how do we rehearse when gatherings of 10 or more are forbidden. The

national choral community is abuzz because singing is one of the riskiest activities for spreading the virus. The excellent examples of ensemble playing and singing that one can find in the media nowadays are the results of hours upon hours of editing and production.

How do we maintain community? Some of my ensembles have virtual happy hours and others have programming of interest to the ensemble that the members of the ensemble can share online and stay in contact. Personally, I am looking for a way to rehearse singers and I am looking into the Virtual Bell Academy for the Canterbury Bells. The lessons I garner from all of this is that we maintain community by sharing our talents however we can.

I hope many of you will volunteer to sing a hymn or two for worship (recorded with social distancing, of course) or you instrumentalists will share a number for a musical interlude for worship either with me accompanying on a recording or if you have a video already done. You don't have to be a professional musician – just share your talents. (Remember the parable of the talents!) This would be a great way to enhance worship and participate in our community!

I wish you a happy summer!
Leon Burke, *Music Director*

TRACEY'S BLESSINGS – MOVING TO NEW WAYS OF BEING

It is that time of year that we honor and celebrate our gifted Graduates! May you all be blessed as you move into your future endeavors.

Graduating from High School: **Evan Lindhorst** graduated from Webster Groves High School. He will attend St. Louis Community College at Meramec with an undecided major. **Josh Shannon** graduated from Affton High School. He will attend University of Missouri—Rolla for Computer Science. **Thomas Welnick** graduated from McKinley classical Leadership Academy; he will be attending the Conservatory of Music at the University of Missouri—Kansas City.

We look forward to having a garden again this year but will ask families to pull weeds as you find time to stop by the garden. Thank you!

Vacation Bible School will be held virtually June 14-18. We will Zoom from 7-7:30 each evening unless most of you are unable to be present at that time of day. If your children are interested you must register with Miss Tracey at Tracey.Harris@firstchurchwg.org. The theme is **Barnyard Round Up** and our Thursday session will be a virtual farm tour.

Thank you for your support as I have been journeying through seminary. My time as a Student Pastor has ended and soon my job of Director of Christian Education (DCE) will also end. The time I have spent ministering among you is so near and dear to my heart. You have allowed me to grow through spending time with you. Thank you for all you have given to me in prayers, kind words and encouragement while walking this journey with me. Thank you.

Peace and Blessings,
Tracey Harris, *Director of Christian Education*



CLIFF'S NOTES & NEWS FROM THE MINISTRY OF IMAGINATION, CREATIVITY AND THE ARTS



MICA has been awarded a Calvin Vital Worship Grant funded by the Lilly Foundation. It's a prestigious honor with 40 congregations from around the country being selected each year. The grant funds a full year (beginning this June) that allows congregations to pursue a focused worship emphasis. Our proposal theme is "to enliven our church's worship through the arts and environmental awareness by rediscovering the wonder, joy and commitment of being stewards of God's creation."

Our original proposal included group workshop gatherings and participatory worship that is not now possible due to the corona virus pandemic. For that reason, we've had to reinvent a virtual process to accomplish our goals. Here's the new synopsis that we have proposed.

Living into the current Covid-19 pandemic we will create 6 interactive webinars and virtual worship services to explore and celebrate God's Creation through science and the arts. Webinars and worship will be hosted by a theological interpreter, ecological guide, and different artists. A jazz septet will provide the musical thread throughout the year. Our biblical study will focus on Psalm 8 and Mark 2: 21-22. A daylong Earth Festival and Jazz Vespers will cap off the year if we are able to once again be in close proximity.

The Calvin Worship Institute has enthusiastically endorsed our grant revision. So, it's full speed ahead. An Implementation and Planning Team from our church will meet soon (virtually) to begin our planning process. Stay tune, more information will be coming soon – including suggested ways in which you can participate in this exciting process.

Virtual Blessings,
Cliff

HOW TO GIVE TO FIRST CHURCH WHILE WE'RE APART

If you are accustomed to putting an offering in the plate on Sunday mornings, you're kind of stuck right now. Believe it or not, even at this time, the church's expenses continue, and keeping current with your pledge is possible. Either send a check made out to "FCCWG" at:

First Congregational Church of Webster Groves
10 W. Lockwood Ave.
Webster Groves, MO 63119

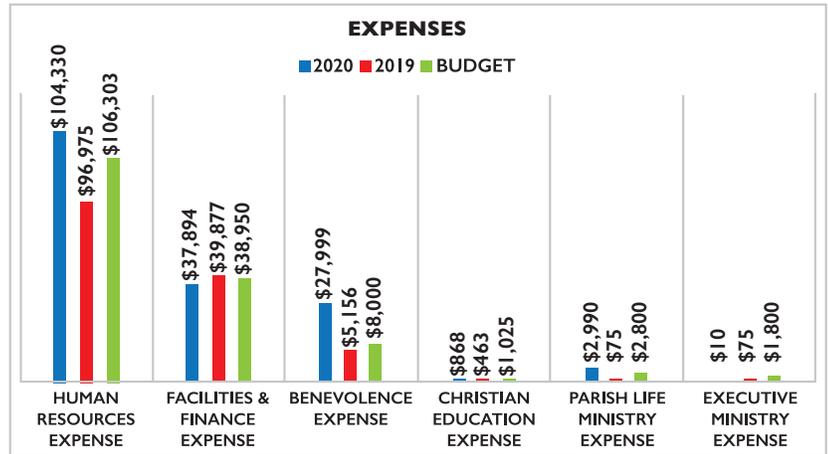
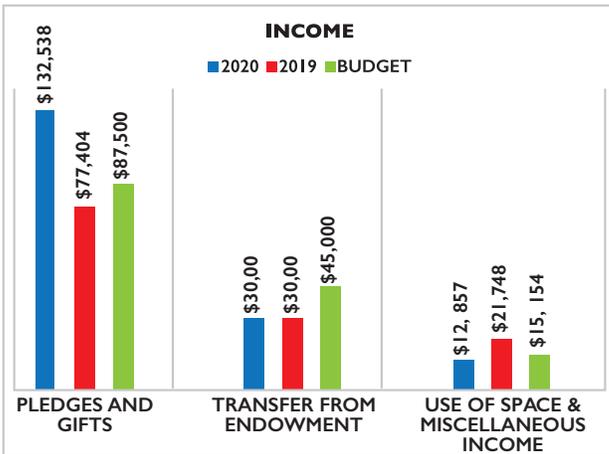


or visit the "DONATE" page of our website (<http://FirstChurchWG.org/donate>), to make an electronic contribution.

On the other hand, if you have been laid off or your business cannot operate during the "shelter in place" order (or if you just need to decrease your pledge), you can adjust the amount you have committed by contacting Treasurer Jenny Jones. She will make a confidential record of your adjustment, no questions asked.

TREASURER'S REPORT

The charts below show church income and expenses for March 2020, March 2019 as compared to the budget:



Items to note:

- Pledges and Gifts income is higher this year because we received over \$40,000 of 2020 pledges in 2019. How did that happen and why? People took advantage of tax planning by doubling up on their charitable giving or using their retirement account required minimum distribution to fulfill their 2020 pledge early.
- Since we did receive those 2020 pledges early, we are currently in a stable cash position with approximately \$200,000 in cash and mutual funds.

In addition, the church has applied and been approved for a \$62,300 loan through the Paycheck Protection Program of the CARES Act. The loan has a two year term with 1% interest, with no penalty for early prepayment. The Paycheck Protection Program (PPP loan) was created to provide loans to help organizations keep their workforce employed during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis. What makes a PPP loan so enticing is the potential for it to be forgiven. We will be working on getting forgiveness as soon as funds are received.

If you have any other questions or want further detail, please let me know.

Thanks

Jennifer Jones, *Treasurer*

JUNE BIRTHDAYS

Donna Hull – June 1
 Jenny Jones – June 3
 Nolan Breitenbach – June 4
 Christina Hood – June 5
 Michael Monaco – June 8
 Payton White-Lenard – June 8
 Charles Griffith – June 9
 Lauren Bakker-Arkema – June 11
 Suzie Barnes – June 11
 Ryan White-Lenard – June 11
 Ginny Conlee – June 16
 Laszlo Kopetti – June 17
 Nick Paci – June 18



Cliff Aerie – June 19
 Mia Genazzi – June 19
 Darryl White-Lenard – June 22
 Gus McLean – June 23
 Abigail Monaco – June 23
 Jonathan Brader – June 24
 Bob McCoy – June 24
 Lucy Corelli – June 27
 Rosemary Hensley – June 27
 Ron Gomez – June 29
 Aiden Kaalberg – June 29
 Randy Whitman – June 29



Missouri Mid-South Conference United Church of Christ

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Uniting Congregations for Ministry and Mission in Missouri, Arkansas, and Memphis, Tennessee
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A Pastoral Letter from the Rev. Dr. Ginny Brown Daniel, Conference Minister

“My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain! Oh, the walls of my heart! My heart is beating wildly; I cannot keep silent; for I hear the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war. Disaster overtakes disaster, the whole land is laid waste. Suddenly my tents are destroyed, my curtains in a moment.”

Jeremiah 4:18-20

When the prophet Jeremiah described his anguish at the injustice and oppression in his time, there was no mincing words. He was heartbroken, as was God. I imagine God’s anguish continues today given the recent murders of persons of color. Last week it was Breonna Taylor, a few weeks before it was Ahmaud Arbery, and this week it is George Floyd. All children of God created in God’s image.

And yet, this is not a sudden turn of racial violence and terror. This is but a long line of persons of color murdered because they were black. The only difference now is that a camera recorded each of these lynchings for all of us to witness for ourselves. For those of us who are white, I implore you not to speak of your shock at these recent murders. Instead, we must acknowledge that our shock is a sign of our white privilege, where we can look the other way at the racism around and within us. For those who are persons of color, I can’t imagine the layers of rage, fear, anger, and demand to be treated fairly seethe within.

And here we are as the Missouri Mid-South Conference of the United Church of Christ. How will we respond to this racial terror? It is no longer acceptable to write inclusive messages of solidarity or post progressive statements. We must act. We must demand that racism in parks, businesses, neighborhoods, streets and our UCC Churches must be dismantled.

As your Conference Minister, I call upon each Church, Minister, and Member of the Missouri Mid-South Conference to take action in dismantling racism. I humbly offer a few suggestions:

- For those who are white – name your complicity in white supremacy. It is not enough to read books like “White Fragility.” We must embody our readings with actions. We must speak up and say that what happened to Ms. Taylor, Mr. Arbery, and Mr. Floyd is racial violence and lynching. We must confess our own racism, by breaking down our own racial bias in our relationships and the organizations to which we belong.
- For those who are persons and Churches of color – process your pain, triggers, anger, and rage. Give the anti-racism work back to your white neighbors (especially those who claim themselves allies). Demand equity in every circle of the United Church of Christ. Take comfort with each other that this is sometimes heartbreaking work. And live boldly as God created you in God’s image.
- For all of us – be honest and vulnerable with one another, especially in the uncomfortable moments when dismantling racism becomes personal.

I am aware that my words in this letter have no institutional authority because each Church governs itself within the UCC. I offer you my prayerful suggestions as work we must do if we are ever to truly celebrate a Pentecost of the risen Christ. May God’s prophetic righteousness be our Companion.

Blessings, Ginny



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Rev. Cliff Aerie
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Seek Christ in each. Serve God in all.

JUNE MEAL-A-MONTH

Boxed Whole Wheat Pasta • Pasta Sauce (Low salt and sugar)
Canned Mixed Vegetables (low or no salt)
Canned Fruit in own juices
Powdered Milk, shelf stable milk, soy milk
Baby Fruits • Baby Vegetables • Baby Cereal

MISSING SOMEONE?

Have you been missing someone for a while from worship and other church events? Please, let Pastor Dave Denoon or Parish Life Chair, know. Either will be happy to follow up for you.

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