



COVENANT NEWS

The Newsletter of the First Congregational Church of Webster Groves

JULY-AUGUST
2020

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FROM THE PASTOR

Sex and the Resurrection

Have you not read that the one who made [human beings] at the beginning "made them male and female" ... Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it is given.

(Matthew 19:4, 11)

Our church bell will ring on Wednesday, August 26, at 12 noon.

Jesus' above statement about equality has sometimes been ignored or disregarded, because Matthew (and Mark and Luke) has couched it in an argument about divorce. Readers have tended to focus on the injustice of first century Jewish divorce leaving women destitute. In fact, Jesus was more likely arguing the absurdity of his detractors' question, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?" (Matthew 19:3)

In a separate argument, this time over the matter of marriage, Jesus' challengers supposed a situation in which one woman dies after having been widowed by each of seven brothers in succession. "In the resurrection, whose wife is she?" Jesus responded again to the absurdity of the question: "You know neither the scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection neither are they married nor given in marriage." (Matthew 22:23-30)

Jesus' assertion in both cases was for the equality of the sexes, as far as heaven is concerned, and the importance of Christians applying heaven's standards rather than earth's. The presumed power of a man either to possess a woman because he has married her (Matthew 22) or to presume to discard another human being with whom he has made a sacred covenant (Matthew 19) completely disregards the essential humanity of the other person! If you believe in the resurrection as a reality that anyone who has been baptized is experiencing, then that baptism is THE great equalizer.

So, when Abigail Adams warned her husband John to "Remember the women," as he and the men of the second Continental Congress gathered in Philadelphia in 1776 to lay the groundwork of our republic, she was understanding the scriptures and the power of God.

You might imagine that, even if the Founders would not attend the call of women (or Black people or people without property) for equality in suffrage, they might at least have considered what Jesus had said about sex and the resurrection. But the outcome in 1776, and for another 154 years, was that women were not allowed the right to vote.

The League of Women Voters is inviting us to remember the moment on August 26, one hundred years ago, when that reality shifted, and American women's agency as participants in our corporate decision-making began to be exercised nationwide. We will ring our bell at noontime on August 26 in celebration of the signing a century ago of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution.

With gladness and pride let us remember the women!

Peace.

PASTOR DAVE DENSON



WORSHIP NOTES FOR JULY-AUGUST (AND BEYOND) 2020

by Pastor Dave Denoon

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, JULY 5, 10:00 AM — *Fifth Sunday after Pentecost; Independence Day Weekend; Virtual Communion.* Scriptures: Zechariah 9:9-12; Psalm 145:8-14. Create a place-setting for yourself of bread and wine, juice, or water, to partake with others in our “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.)

“It is not at all puzzling to me that joy is possible in the midst of difficulty,” says Ross Gay, a professor of English at Indiana University. He is also a gardener and a devotee of delight, as well as a poet and author. I’ll consider with you Prof. Gay’s perspective, as we delve into scriptures that appear to agree with him. I’ve entitled my ***Message of the Day: “Most High”***

SUNDAY, JULY 12, 10:00 AM — *Sixth Sunday after Pentecost.* Scripture: Isaiah 55:10-13; Psalm 65; Matthew 13:1-9. Isaiah insists that the fruitfulness of God’s Word is irresistible. Picking up this theme, Matthew presents Jesus’ Parable of the Sower which is interpreted (13:18-23) as though some people might not take the Word so well. I’ll look with you at some modern-day interpreters, so we can draw our own conclusions. ***Message of the Day: “With Ears to Hear”***

SUNDAYS, JULY 19 AND 26, 9:00 AM — (Please, note the time: one hour earlier than usual) — *Seventh and Eighth Sundays after Pentecost* Pastor Dave Denoon and Director of Music and Organist Leon Burke III will be taking their vacations, July 14 – 27, and church members and friends are encouraged to attend worship on the Zoom platform with the **First Congregational Church of Rockport, Massachusetts**. The Rockport church is the home congregation of Garie & Ken Perry, most summers, and the Perrys and Pastor Derek van Gulden look forward to greeting you there.

To connect using Zoom with the Rockport church using Zoom, please send an email, a couple of days in advance, to webmaster@rockportucc.org, requesting the Meeting ID and passcode.

SUNDAY, AUGUST 2 – AUGUST 30, 10:00 AM — *Ninth through Twentieth Sundays after Pentecost; Pride Weekend.* For many months now, the Pastor has been reflecting upon the work of Karen Armstrong and her varietal team of faith leaders who developed “The Charter for Compassion.” For twelve Sundays from August 2 through October 18, Pastor Dave will be tracing a path through Karen Armstrong’s book, *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life* and inviting worshipers to travel with him. During August, the five messages will be:

August 2 – “What Is Compassion?”

August 9 – “Look at Your World”

August 16 – “Bless Your Heart”

August 23 – “Beyond ‘Love Thy Neighbor’”

August 30 – “Getting to Know the ‘I Within’”

MODERATOR'S CORNER JULY & AUGUST 2020

The summer months have arrived and the world around us continues to change. As we enter July and celebrate the founding of our country with social distancing and encounter racial unrest and questionable action by people in authority, I have found myself doing a lot of reflecting, particularly as we try to plan for the future of our church. Strategic Planning is looking at how we can implement the elements of our Covenant and be a better church for our congregation and for our community. At the same time, the Restart Committee is trying to figure out the best time and way to resume activities and in person worship services.

During this past month we have encountered a lot and I have come to the realization that the greatest change I have perceived in myself and society is one of awareness. I have a totally different perception of what “Black Lives Matter” really means and why this movement is so relevant. Much has been written but this article by Shai Linne, a Christian hip hop artist, “touched” my awareness (<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/george-floyd-and-me/>). I also read a speech from the former Mayor of New Orleans, Mitch Landrieu, regarding the removal of Confederate statues in New Orleans (<https://time.com/4790674/mitch-landrieu-new-orleans-confederate-monuments-speech/>) that gave me a different perspective about the issue. I have seen protest in small cities that have never had protests and people who were silent now speaking out. We have much to digest and many opportunities for discussion regarding the social issues of our society.

Another “awareness” that I have recognized relates to COVID-19 and the mediating of risk. As we move deeper into the pandemic it has become obvious to me that until a treatment and a vaccine are developed, we are destined to live with risk no matter how many safety protocols we follow. I realize that risk pertains to more than just protecting myself from others, but also my obligation to protect others from myself. Every day I see redefined socialization taking place in public gatherings, restaurants, grocery stores, businesses, and churches. Social distancing and the wearing of masks seems to be defined by the location and the people involved, not necessarily by guidelines or recommendations. Government entities are under great pressure to move towards a “new norm” that looks a lot like the “old norm.” I have become aware of the fact that it is up to me to determine how much risk I am willing to assume and ultimately that my decision will affect both myself and others. This is the question that each of us will have to answer as we move towards the restart of church activities and in person worship. No matter what plan is devised there will be a certain element of risk. We can do all that we can to reduce the risk, but it will always be there. We must all be aware of the individual choices that we will be forced to make based upon our personal circumstances and preferences. We must also be aware that our choices will also affect others around us.

This is the challenge that the Restart Committee is facing as we move closer to a plan. It is our intention to create an environment that reduces risk and provides you with a scenario in which you are comfortable making a choice. Thank you for your understanding and support as we continue to develop a plan in a very fluid situation. It will happen!

Together in Christ,
Mark Edwards
Moderator

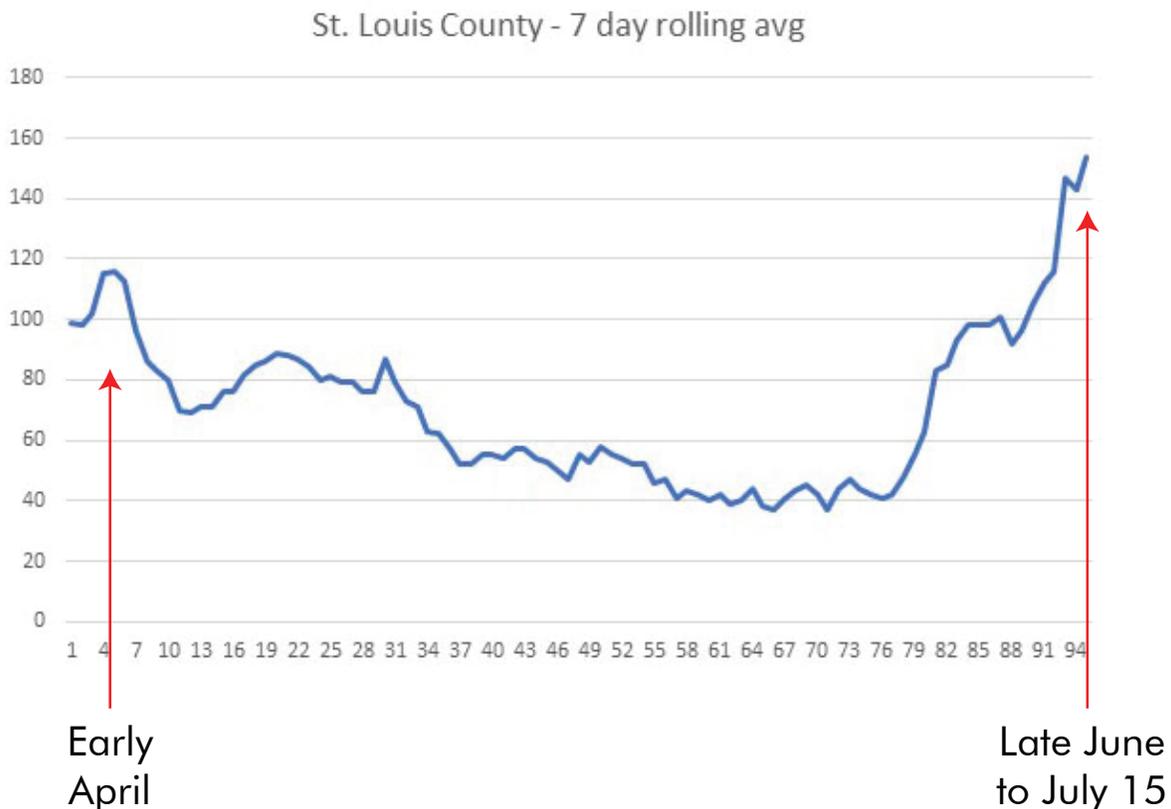
RESTART COMMITTEE UPDATES

The committee tasked by the Executive Ministries with determining how and when to reopen First Congregational Church's facilities for various group activities (including but not limited to Worship) goes by the name Restart Committee. It is composed of Doug Miller & Linda Kopetti (co-chairs), Chip Istringhaus, Debbie Tolstoi, Lynda Morrison, Mark Edwards, Joan Musbach, and Pastor Dave Denoon). The committee has been meeting an average of 3 times per month since May 13, 2020. It has established three main criteria on which to base its decisions:

1. COVID-19 incident case curves for St. Louis County and for St. Louis City (using 7-day rolling averages)
2. The quality and thoroughness of the COVID-19 prevention protocol that the groups requesting to restart are being asked to submit as part of their application to reopen
3. The extent to which a group's activities would put our church staff members at increased risk of acquiring COVID.

The committee uses the recommendations and ordinances of the Missouri Mid-South Conference (MMSM) and the St. Louis Metropolitan Pandemic task force to help guide its decision-making process.

The committee was making good progress deciding how to restart group activities through the end of June. However, we have observed an alarming increase in COVID cases in the county over the past couple of weeks. The weekly surge in cases has surpassed the weekly cases reported in early April by up to 150% and looks as if it foretells exponential growth of COVID cases in our area.



Continued

Given this situation, at meetings on July 1, and July 15, the Restart Committee established the following procedures for use of the church:

- All group activities using the church's internal facilities have been put on hold until the county COVID curves show significant calming
- Consistent with a strong recommendation by the MMSC, in-person Worship has been put on hold until calming is seen (see Rev. Dr. Ginny Brown Daniels report here: <https://tinyurl.com/ybcpcq4m>)
- Consistent with recently established orders by both the county and city, all visitors to the church are **required to wear a mask and to maintain proper social distancing while in the facility. Related details:**
 - ◇ **Please note: masks are extremely useful for preventing spread from an infected person to others with whom they interact (also very important if the mask wearer is an asymptomatic carrier).**
 - ◇ **Please note: It is essential that masks cover both the nose and mouth to provide maximum protection against spread!**
 - ◇ **The church will have masks available for anyone who inadvertently forgets to wear a mask into the church; however, people not willing to wear a mask will not be allowed in the building.**
 - ◇ **Children over the age of two years and youth are required to wear masks while in the church, as well as adults.**
 - ◇ **Persons with their own office in the church are requested to conduct as much of their business in their office as possible. They can take their mask off when alone in their office (but have the mask nearby for quick access if and when needed).**
 - ◇ **If someone is meeting with another person(s) in their own office, they can mask or not mask based on what all parties to that meeting are comfortable with.**
 - ◇ **Masks are always required entering and leaving the office, for visits to the bathroom and other parts of the church, etc.**
 - ◇ **Please note that certain rooms share HVAC air space with other rooms nearby, which can facilitate viral spread between rooms. If you are planning to take your mask off while in your office, please check with church staff about which other rooms share air space with your office.**
- It would be a nice courtesy to notify church staff (Debbie, Darryl, Chip) when you are planning to visit. This will be helpful not only for the staff person's planning purposes, but also so staff can alert you if particular rooms have been potentially contaminated recently.
- **PLEASE NOTE** that this is a very fluid situation which changes day-to-day and week-to-week. The committee will continue its careful work and will update the congregation regularly as things develop.

Doug Miller, Linda Kopetti

Co-Chairs, Restart Committee

TRACEY'S BLESSINGS – GIVING THANKS



I am overwhelmed by all the love and support I have received from this congregation throughout my ministry among you, and as I move on. The Spirit is sending me to learn new things and lead in not only a different place but in a different job. ALL of you at First Congregational, have been vital in helping me grow to be the Pastor that God is leading me to become. You have given me the courage to learn to attend seminary at my age! So, thank you all for ten wonderful years together, and all of your gifts that you have given to me as I leave.

I will always think of The First Congregational Church with love, every time I wear my new robe. I cannot begin to thank you all enough.

Thank you to Pastor Dave for the mentoring and support on this journey as well.

I will come back to complete my journey when I am ordained in the sanctuary at First Congregational.

Psalm 9

I will thank you, Lord, with all my heart;
I will talk about all your wonderful acts.
I will celebrate and rejoice in you;
I will sing praises to your name,
Most High.

Peace and Blessings to all of you!

Tracey Harris



Connie Kitchen July 2
Kara Hoganson July 6
Katie Didriksen July 9
Loryl Breitenbach July 10
Katy Ver Hagen July 11
Barbara Krewson July 12
Marilyn Davis July 13
Jeanene Harris July 13
John Shoulberg July 19
Greg McCoy July 28
Emma von Weise July 29
Alice McHugh July 31



Sue Stepleton August 10
John Paci August 13
Edward Hoganson August 18
Julie McHugh August 20
Sharon Beal August 23
George Krewson August 28

ANNUAL MEETING MINUTES

VIRTUAL MEETING VIA ZOOM — JUNE 28, 2020

The **ANNUAL MEETING** was called to order by moderator, Mark Edwards, at 10:44 a.m.

The slate of church officers which had been approved by the Executive Ministry was presented. There was no discussion or comment. A vote was held with the following results:

Yeas — 50

Nays — 0

Abstentions — 0

The slate was passed by Zoom voters. Instructions were presented for mail-in, email, and text ballots.

RITUAL FOR ENDING OF A MINISTRY: Tracey Harris was honored following more than 10 years as Director of Christian Education. A drive-by parade will take place in the east parking lot on Tuesday, at 2:00, Tracey's last official day.

Representatives from Christian Education spoke to honor Tracey:

- Elyse von Weisse gave an emotional message of love and support;
- Doug Miller expressed thankfulness for Tracey's help and guidance;
- Pat Doyle-Grace expressed admiration and thanks for Tracey's skill with the Children's Messages and for help from Tracey and the children with Special Friends.

Congregational members were invited to speak and many offered their love and best wishes for Tracey's future endeavors.

Joan Musbach, as chair of Parish Life, presented from the church through Parish Life a pastoral robe designed specifically for Tracey.

David Denoon completed the Ritual for Ending of Ministry with Tracey, ending with release from the church and prayer.

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Mary Edwards and seconded by Jenny Jones. Motion was approved and the meeting was adjourned at 11:16 a.m.

Date: 7-14-2020

Amendment — Final tally of votes for the slate of officers.

Yeas — 63

Nays — 0

Abstentions — 0

Marilyn Davis
Church Clerk

CLIFF'S NOTES & NEWS FROM THE MINISTRY OF IMAGINATION, CREATIVITY AND THE ARTS UPDATE ON THE EARTH WALK GRANT



Our church has been awarded a Calvin Vital Worship Grant funded by Lilly Endowment, Inc. The grant is a prestigious honor that allows 40 congregations to pursue a year focused on worship leading to “revitalization that increases their ability to reach out to the world with the good news of the gospel.”

Our proposal theme focuses on enlivening 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. With the onset of the Covid pandemic this is no longer possible. We have designed our proposal to create a virtual process to accomplish our goals.

Our aim is to create three informational webinars, followed by three inspirational YouTube worship services. Webinars and worship will explore and celebrate God’s Creation through science and the arts. As theological guide, Cliff Aerie will host each webinar and worship service inviting ecological guides and artist interpreters to help explore and interpret humanity’s role as caretakers of God’s Creation. At the conclusion of the grant year we hope to produce an Earth Walk Festival and jazz vesper service to celebrate our learnings in person. The Oikos Ensemble will provide the musical thread throughout the year.

Our year-long biblical study will focus on Psalm 8, proclaiming the bounty and blessing of God’s world, and Jesus’ words in Mark 2: 21-22 declaring that if we are to fully receive the new wine of the Spirit we must create new wineskins in which to receive it. While our initial planning has only just begun, our Planning and Implementation Team has developed initial themes for our three major phases:

- exploring the blessings and wonder of God’s Creation
- discovering our role as co-creators with the Creator
- pursuing ecological justice for the earth and its inhabitants

Members of our planning and implementation team include Jan Barnes, Chris von Weise, Diane McLean, Debbie Tolstoi, John Paci, Phil Shoulberg, Ian Didriksen, Elston McCowen, Leon Burke III, Dave Denoon, and Cliff Aerie as project director. Each member is involved in the planning, design and implementation of our year-long program.

Stay tuned for more information coming soon – including suggested ways in which you can participate in this exciting process.

Please note: This program is made possible through a Vital Worship Grant from the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, Grand Rapids, Michigan, with funds provided by Lilly Endowment Inc.

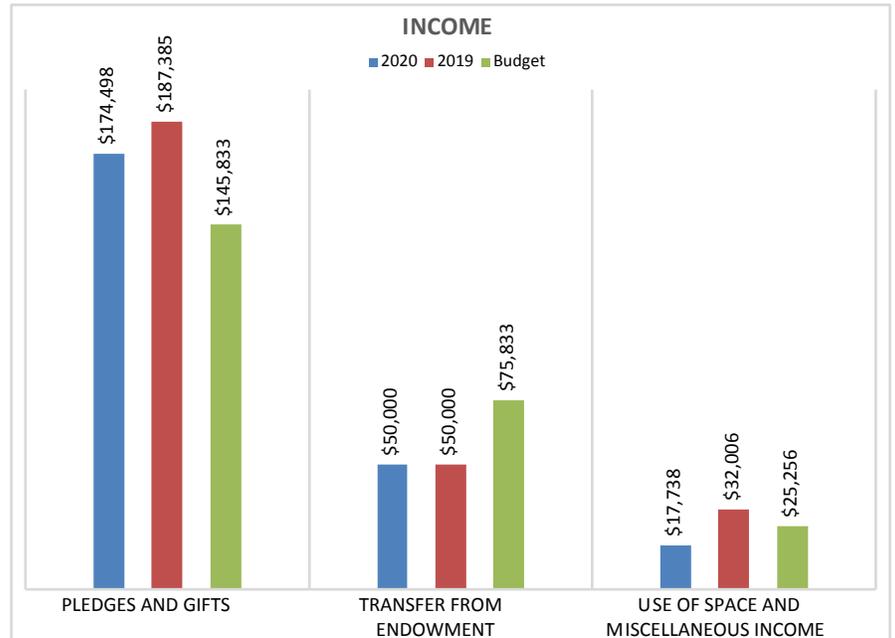
Virtual Blessings,
Cliff Aerie

TREASURER'S REPORT

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

Items to note regarding operating income:

- Pledges and Gifts income is now lower than prior year to date figures due to two factors
 - 2020 pledge income is declining since the pandemic started (see 2 below)
 - May 2019 pledge income was unusually higher than normal at \$65,987 and a special gift from Joe Logan
- Church pledge income has slowly declined each month since the pandemic started:
 - February - \$31,390
 - March - \$30,460
 - April - \$20,972
 - May - \$17,042
- With the church building being closed, the use of church income is down approximately \$14,000 compared to last year

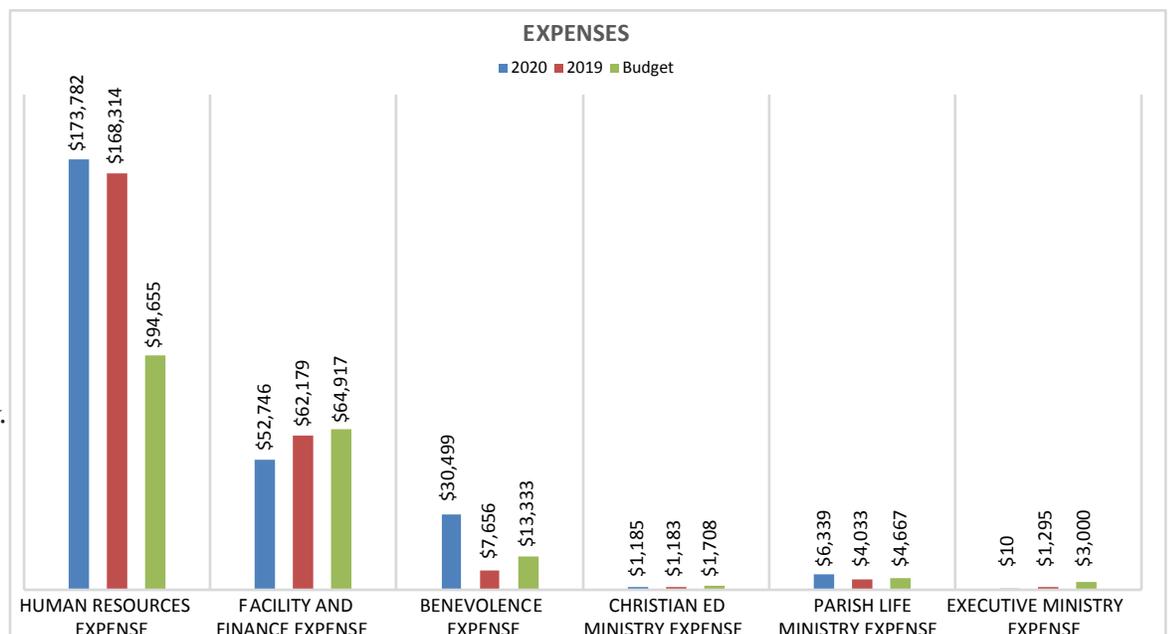


Items to note regarding the balance sheet:

- Cash and short term investments on hand were about the same at the end of May, as follows:
 - May 2020 - \$231,178
 - May 2019 - \$227,026
- One reason the cash balance is comparative to last year is because the church applied for a loan provided by the Paycheck Protection Program of the CARES Act. The \$62,300 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. The PPP loan has the potential for a portion of the loan to be forgiven if the funds were used for payroll, benefits, rent and utilities. We are currently gathering information for the forgiveness application.

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

Thanks
Jennifer Jones
Treasurer



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.

MEAL-A-MONTH ON TEMPORARY HOLD

As First Congregational is not open at this time, we cannot accept any food donations for Webster Rock Hill Ministries.

Due to the generosity of neighbors and friends, their pantries are loaded. Not only does WRHM have a food pantry, but they provide other services to the community such as: utility assistance, home maintenance and repair, birthday outreach for children, nursing and legal consultations.

If you would like to make a monetary donation to Webster Rock Hill Ministries, please mail a check to:

Webster Rock Hill Ministries
111 East Waymire Avenue
Webster Groves, MO 63119

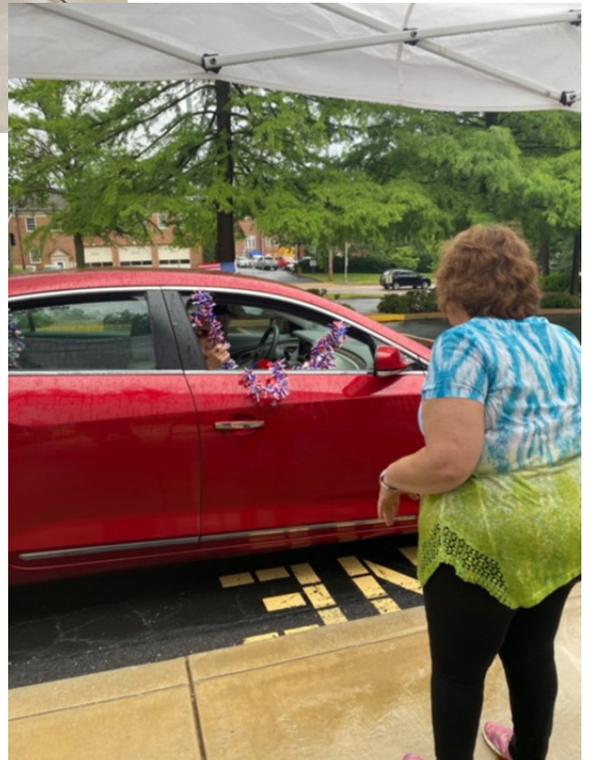
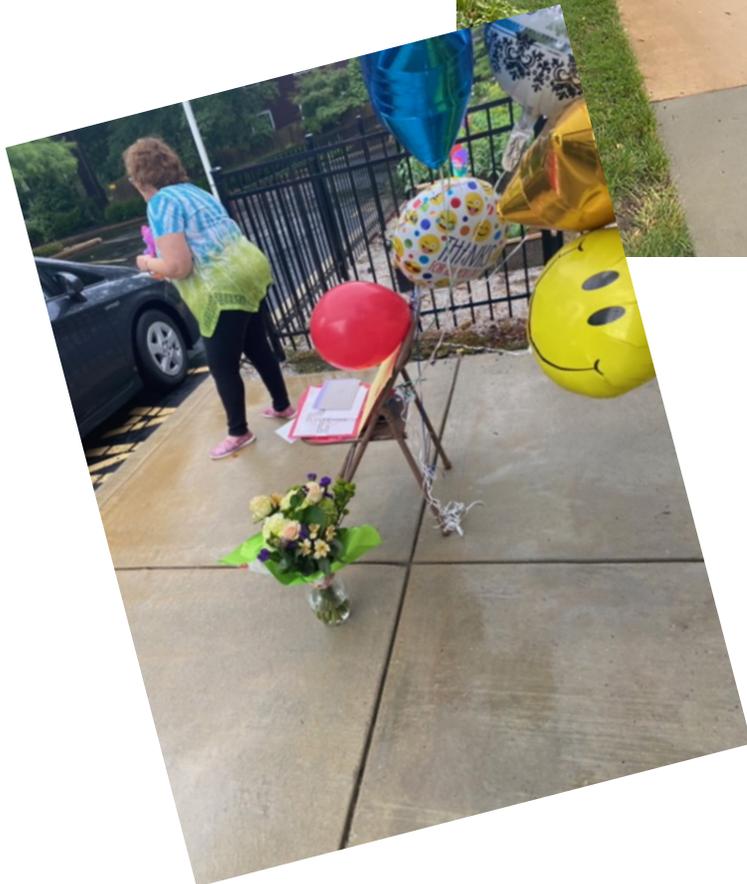
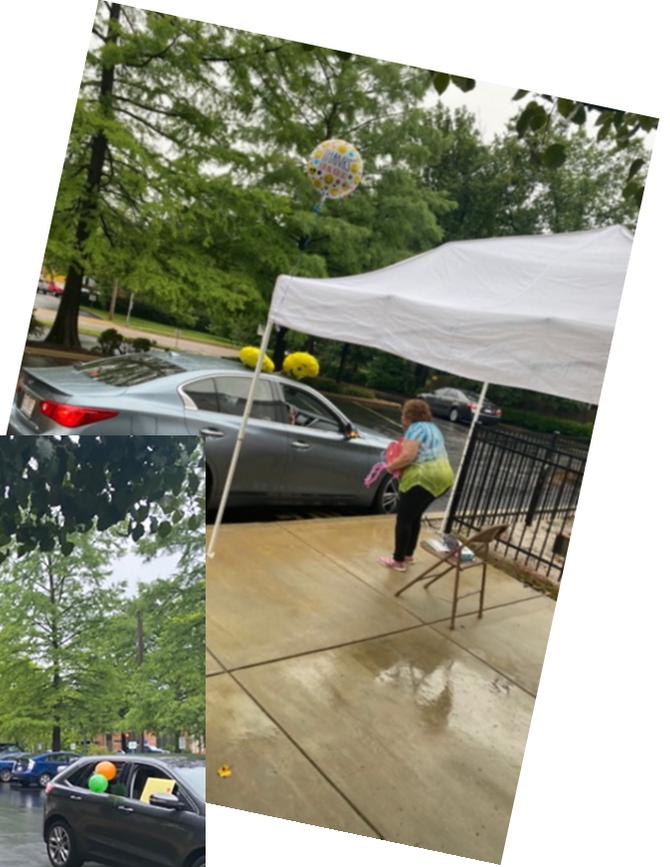
Or reach out by phone at 314-961-5082 to see how you can provide assistance.

REFLECTING AND SHARING OUR LIVES AMIDST PANDEMIC

According to the "Open Rate," report by our email service, it appears that many of our members are enjoying the weekly reflections. There are multiple advantages to "Reflecting & Sharing." It helps those sharing get in touch with their thoughts and priorities. It helps us stay connected with each other. It provides comic relief in stressful times. They will be saved in our church vault for future generations. And... it can give us perspective.

Hopefully some of you will reflect and share for future weeks as the summer of 2020 moves forward. Please send stories, jokes or reflections to Joan Musbach at: jwmusbach@gmail.com or mail to: 415 Westrick Place, Kirkwood, MO 63122.

A FAREWELL PARADE FOR TRACEY!
We Were Not Going to Let a Little Rain Ruin her Parade!





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Assistant Custodian
Gus McLean

Director, Center for Counseling & Healing
Rev. Linda E. Smith, BCRN, LCSW, HTCP/I
lesrhs@sbcglobal.net

Director of MICA
Rev. Cliff Aerie
cliff.aerie@gmail.com

Seek Christ in each. Serve God in all.

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, Joan Musbach know. Either will be happy to follow up for you.

FOLLOW US ON

Facebook

www.facebook.com/FirstChurchWG/

SoundCloud

www.soundcloud.com/firstchurchwg

YouTube

<http://bit.ly/FCCWG-YT>

